

# OAK WOOD

Oakwood 2003 is in memory of

**Audrae Vissar**

(1919-2001):

1948 Graduate of South Dakota State University,  
Poet Laureate of South Dakota 1974-2001.

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# A History of *Oakwood*

Originally titled *Calliope*, the first issue of South Dakota State University's literary and arts publication appeared in the Fall of 1967, edited by James Murray. Much like the *Oakwood* of today, the original publication included poetry, prose, and artwork created mainly by SDSU students and faculty, but it was also open to the Brookings community. *Calliope*'s mission statement was to publish twice a year, in the Fall and in the Spring, funding and materials permitting. Although 1968 was the only year two issues appeared, it still had enough funding to see print once a year, usually arriving in the Spring. Under the original title, *Calliope* ran for eight years and cost 48 cents a copy.

The final issue of *Calliope* was published in 1974. One of its staff members was Doug Cockrell, an SDSU student, who would, within the next year, collaborate with English Professor David Allan Evans (the current Poet Laureate of South Dakota and SDSU's Writer in Residence) to introduce to SDSU the first edition of *Oakwood*. Serving as editors, Evans and Cockrell intended for *Oakwood* to be a local publication for SDSU students. They also wanted to make it a regional publication by including authors from neighboring states and thus changed the title to reflect the new regional flavor of the magazine. In more recent years, *Oakwood* has become, as it once was, a publication geared mostly toward the creative output of SDSU students, yet the magazine created by Evans and Cockrell has since served as a precedent for all subsequent issues. In recognition of the efforts made by Professor Evans and Mr. Cockrell, we would like to thank them and present in this edition several of their previously unpublished poems.

While perusing through the past editions of *Oakwood*, we found in the 1993 edition an editor's note written by Amy Siebring-Jurrens, in which she included a brief history of *Oakwood*. In her note, she mentions a time when *Oakwood* was not published. Because of a lack of funding, the 1985 edition was the last to be published until 1992.

In 1987, Brian Winkel, while still in high school in Iowa, learned from an SDSU recruiter about *Oakwood*. He was

impressed by the fact that SDSU had a student-run publication that allowed the students freedom to express and share their creative talents with other students and the SDSU faculty. When he arrived at SDSU, *Oakwood* was no longer in print. But with the encouragement of a close friend—who later died tragically before the 1992 edition ran—Brian Winkel raised *Oakwood* from the dead by obtaining funds from the Students Association Senate and by serving as coeditor. *Oakwood* has been printed every year since its revival in 1992.

In 1993, *Oakwood* began to sponsor the Paul Witherington High School Writers Contest, a contest open to all high school students across South Dakota. *Oakwood* is proud to sponsor this contest as it serves to encourage the use of imagination in the state's youth through the art of words in poetry and storytelling. Desiree Wheaton, among others, has offered her time every year to help *Oakwood* editors review the submissions and choose the contest winners. The 2003 edition is proud to publish the winners of the Tenth Anniversary of the Paul Witherington High School Writers Contest.

In more recent years, *Oakwood* has been the result of the combined efforts of the English Department, the Art and Graphic Design Departments, the SDSU Print Lab, and the Students Association Senate, as well as countless other SDSU faculty members.

We would like to thank all those who are mentioned in this history of *Oakwood* for their drive to keep the magazine alive, and also for their undying support and faith in *Oakwood* not only as a creative outlet for SDSU students, but also as a piece of SDSU history. But we cannot forget to thank the vast number of people who have helped over the years and who have slipped into the seemingly empty spaces between the sentences of this comprehensive history of *Oakwood*.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the contributing authors and artists over the years. Without them and their desire to write, paint and photograph, there would be no magazine to publish. We appreciate their willingness to share their personal art with SDSU. The pages of *Oakwood* are not simply to house poems, stories, paintings, drawing, and photographs, but also to capture, if that is possible, the ideas of the students.

Although the process of taking a concept from nothing but a pile of wrinkled submissions to a real, physical book is confusing and many times frustrating, we all learned a great deal from the experience. We are grateful to all those who have fought to keep *Oakwood* around so that we could have the opportunity to leave a small part of us behind at SDSU. We sincerely hope that *Oakwood* continues long after we have gone.

**Chad Robinson,  
Katie Pavel, and  
Heidi Mayer  
Editors**

Features

## **Winter Hoarfrost**

**Doug Cockrell**

For many days the tree limbs  
were bare as poverty. Then,

one morning, there they were:  
each limb  
white  
with tiny slivers  
that made the limbs  
look like pussy-willows.

And when each sliver fell,  
the air was full  
of diamonds  
in sunlight.



## Old Poet

Doug Cockrell

I touch a book in my study;  
the whole row drops like dominoes  
and crumbles to dust. What  
have I done to deserve this?  
And why does my desk leg  
collapse under my elbow?

## Winter Forecast

Doug Cockrell

Tomorrow there will be a wind  
blowing so hard  
that it will crack your face,  
numb your will  
to live and expose  
your soul. If

you survive,  
there will be snow.

It will eclipse  
the sun and

lie on the river  
that leads anywhere  
but home.

## Miles of Night

Doug Cockrell

Father drives us through miles of night  
packed full of cardboard boxes, suitcases, sacks  
all stuffed inside the '58 Chevy stationwagon,  
while mother, brother, and two sisters sleep  
around me in windowglass; dashlights coldly glowing,  
through Father—gathered in light at the wheel—  
in to the night-lit stars, above sounds  
of merging radio stations fading into a drone.

## 1215 Floyd Boulevard

David Allan Evans

It was only a rehearsal,  
a trial run, that ten-year life.  
It will happen again.

All of us—Mother and Dad  
in their mid-30s in the front seat,  
with Judy between them,  
and Bob, Jerry, Bonnie, and I  
in the back of our shiny,  
black '41 Ford—  
will turn the corner at  
the Cardwell house and  
climb the steep hill behind  
the moving van.  
We'll park at the curb  
and get out; one of us will  
open the gate of the white  
picket fence, most of us  
will be running up the soft,  
red-brick sidewalk.

Then we'll wait for Dad,  
who has the keys.  
But before he opens the door,  
we'll see him pause  
on the cement porch,  
put a hand on the wooden  
swing and push it, gently;  
just as it starts to creak,  
swinging back and forth,  
all will begin again.

# One-Sided Fist Fight On Lower Fourth

(Sioux City, 1960)

David Allan Evans

One night from the safer side of my  
windshield, I watched a tall man pitch

headlong out of the Harber Inn and attack  
a parking meter half his height and

minding its own business. He swung  
with an overhand right—off balance

and with about the same heat it takes  
to toss a cat through an open window—

hit the hard flat face, then backed off  
to watch the reaction. Nothing. Attacked

again, this time with a wishy-washy  
left hook to the skinny iron gut,

then followed with a limp but fairly  
accurate karate front-kick to the shin—

decent one-two timing. Once again, no  
response. So the winner turned around

and steered himself across the street and  
through the open door of the Pink Pussy Cat.

## **Farmhouse**

**Luke Philippi**

The bucket hangs from the well like a noose.

Gusts of wind swing the old pail,  
and rise dust to the antique home.

Windows rattle and shake  
As sand pelts the weathered building.

Specks of white paint  
Stick out on the brown picket fence.

And the few pickets left standing  
Are a reminder to those who pass by

That once the barren fields  
Surrounding the ancient farmhouse

Bore a green life,  
Instead of the brown grass  
Left to rule the meadow.



Untitled  
Turner

## Liebestraum

Todd VanDerWerff

We construct our love  
out of elegant notes  
tenderly struck  
so they drift through  
bright air  
and dusty sunbeams  
popping against ear drums.

Floating above me on a river of music and poetry,  
you build a raft of  
carefully chosen words  
and lie atop it  
in the hot summer sun,  
trailing your fingers through sweet-scented syntax.

We create hope  
from stacks of piano sonatas  
and piles of arguments  
and reservoirs of stolen kisses,  
piecing together the future.

I love it best  
when we clutch  
noiselessly  
and I dive cleanly  
into your inky black pupils  
and luxuriate in you.

I dance emotions  
only you can feel.

We tread delicately  
o'er stained-glass dreams.

# The Death of Mickey Mantle

August 13, 1995

Chad Robinson

The sun is ever high and the  
days stretch endlessly on in the season of  
cracking bats and green knees. But in a sad, sudden  
moment, the machinery of muscle halts; a tidal wave of cheers  
crashes onto the stands, and sinks into acute calm. Gloves  
flop at the players' feet; baseballs clomp to the cleat-  
pitted dust of the diamond. Every starry-  
eyed spectator watches, for the  
last time, Mickey Mantle  
dip to the dirt  
and slide  
home.

# Elegy

Todd VanDerWerff

And so it comes to this.

Wrinkles gnarled around your face like cat scratches,  
Your hands holding onto life,  
Fingers peeled by suffocating weights.

At one time, you swung me through the air.  
I giggled and danced with stars and dragonflies.  
The sky opened.

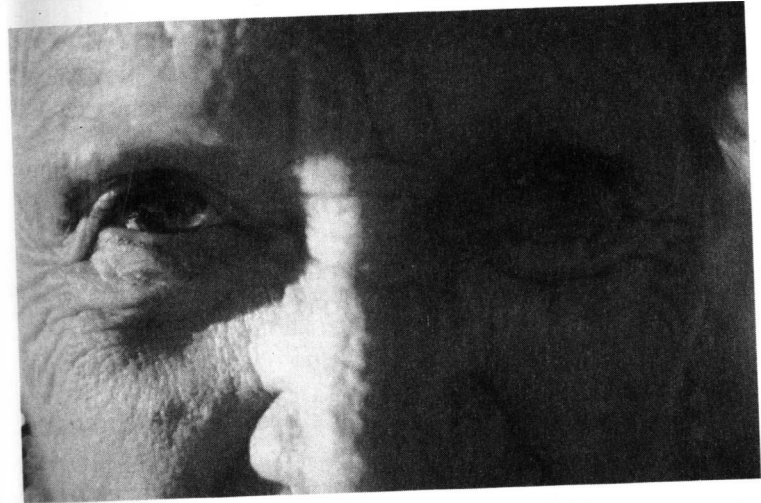
Goodbye to you.  
Goodbye.

This world drains from itself and peace descends.

## Visit to my Grandmother

Michelle Andrews

My grandfather is dead.  
GrammaSophie offers  
me strawberries.  
But they don't taste the same  
anymore.  
We sit in the living room,  
where he is no longer living;  
my brain makes my ears  
hear his voice, deep like my father's.  
And I begin to cry.  
Twice I go to the bathroom  
to cry alone  
like the adult  
I don't want to be.  
I flush the empty toilet,  
run icy water on my fingers and touch my warm wet eyes.  
I smell his soap  
and cry again.  
My grandfather is dead.  
And the living room looks lopsided without him in his chair.



Untitled  
Author Unknown

## Gifts of the Abstract

Heidi Mayer

I've tired of the cliché of life  
The repetition of the expected  
I want to give you more

I want to give you the color of red wine  
That stains the sky between golden day  
And iron night

I want each touch to be a silver flame  
Within the depths of you  
That melds the idea of "us" to reality

I want to wrap you in the white velvet melody  
Of that song you love so well  
With words that make you think of me

I want to give you the static of distant thunder  
And the instantaneous contrast  
Of the platinum lightning to the black night

I want to make each sentence a lullaby  
With rhythms that rock you  
To that place in your dreams you like best

I want to give you a tree beside your favorite shore  
For you to lean upon  
To watch the rise and fall of the iridescent waves

I want to take up a sword  
And strike away the pain that  
Creases your forehead when you sleep

I want to get lost with you in the fog  
So I can drown in the passion of finding you again  
Then I want to lead you home your hand laced in mine

I want to dance with you in white satin  
On white satin  
With motions fluid and cool

I want to be the physical manifestation of your emotion—  
The shiver that runs down your spine  
The racing of your heart

I want to be the place you run away to  
I want to be where you rest, your hideaway  
Your sanctuary

I want to memorize the lines of your hands  
Then trace their patterns in the stars  
And walk those golden paths with you

I want to braid the blues of the Heavens  
Into a garland  
To drape upon your shoulders

I want to give to you the emerald stone  
That lent its color to your eyes  
And the sapphire which lent its shade to mine

I want to be the ring that wraps around your finger  
That you twist unconsciously  
When you're thinking of tomorrows

I want to be with you in your tomorrows  
I want to be the constant  
That remains after all the variables

I want to be the personification  
Of all the qualities that you admire most  
Of all things easiest to love

I want NOT to be yours  
But instead  
To BE for you.





Serenity  
Joel Keickhefer

## Mysteriosity

Patrick Grode

Soft eyes surmounted her warm-colored smile,  
Carefully lipstick'd for tonight...  
Sweetness on calm, regal features—  
I walked out the door with a dream.

Touch the electricity of a kiss—  
Her lightning is hard to forget.  
Sherbet orange-pink of summer dawn...  
Our noses brush in fire and silk.

And to bask in the rose aura of her  
Calmly wraps all worlds in velvet;  
Sharp lines defy reality—  
She assaults the tepid mundane.

## Sunlight on a Frosted Windowpane

Katie Pavel

Shards of light  
Cast through prisms of  
Crystal ice  
Separate into colors  
Across the spectrum  
Brighten to a shimmering glow  
Then slowly melt away

## Psalm 9

Jamie M. Kueter

Oh, my pad-footed bundle of wonder,  
My velvet-coated fuzzball of happiness,  
Stealthy hunter of dust-bunnies,  
My happy cat.  
My moody, happysadmad cat,  
One minute, sleepy snoozing snowball;  
Whirling dervish demon a minute later.  
I love you to death when you're acting cute.  
I love you not so much when you cough hairballs on the floor.  
Oh, your green-eyed glory,  
My little calico angel,  
Nimble gymnast of the bookshelves and counters,  
My happy cat.  
Kneading my tummy with experienced paws like a baker  
kneading bread  
Working the dough of my stomach with gently pushing paws,  
Your purring lulls me to sleep,  
Lulls the town to sleep,  
Lulls the state to sleep.  
Lulls...the world...to...Zzzzzzzzz

## The Frustrated Poet

Bonnie Phelps

1  
Give us something—  
to touch? to hear? to see?  
scream the craggy scratches  
of obtrusive red-stained words.  
Scrutinizing etchings, as if written  
with the tip of a blood-dipped knife,  
leave a scarred and frazzled trail  
of slashed withering veins of thought.  
Scribbled tracks of liquid investigation tarry...  
oozing tenuously across the paper canvas  
of passion and turmoil—  
the deepest most interpersonal thoughts  
sliced into slivers of raw nothingness.

2  
Mangled twisting lines of waste-oil words  
randomly drip from pierced memories,  
splattering incoherent thoughts  
upon the hardened ground  
of imagination and ideas.  
Emotions posed upon the words  
like dust on a windowsill  
disappear, as wet drops of red criticism  
pelt the open sores of sorrows written,  
leaving blurred reflections  
on spit-washed windows to the heart.

3  
Frustrated and confused,  
I sit upon the throne  
of water and waster,  
waiting for constipation of words to pass;  
contemplating removal of poetic ambition  
with the use of a strong laxative—  
Reality.  
Muse of poetic intuition flushed away  
with the clarification that only a few  
are chosen and granted the gift  
of artistic pen.



Getcha  
Lisa Bender

## Modern-Day Muse

Erica Rorvik

I am not full of magic,  
Nor do words from my lips rest in men's hearts.  
I am far from their minds,  
And much farther from their love.  
But though my mysterious ways are few,  
I could be the greatest inspiration to you.

Close your eyes  
And feel my kiss rest upon your lips,  
As sweet, and as deep, as a red strawberry,  
Gently teasing, asking for more.  
Feel my light touch,  
Like dew caressing the early morn.

Allow me to awaken your sleeping dragon,  
Your gift of artistry hidden away.  
Let it breathe fire into your fingertips,  
As the artful energy flows from your intricate hands  
To the empty, awaiting paper.

Soon your strong arms, pencil, and paper become one.  
I cannot distinguish where one ends,  
And the other begins.  
But now your eyes begin to burn with passion  
As you see what wonder will become  
Of your imagination and talent.

I blow softly in your ear,  
Whispering the sweet nothings of a muse.  
Yet I feel your energy radiating from your body.  
Faster and faster your hands fly,  
As you occasionally search my eyes  
And see into the depths of my soul.

I gently nibble on your ear,  
And make sweet interactions with your neck.  
Soon your masterpiece is done  
And one between you and I has just begun.

I have become the charcoal in your hand  
And I do not know,  
Nor do I care,  
Where I begin  
And where you end.

## Chivalry Is Dead

Patrick Grode

Chivalry died on the altar of sensitivity.  
Incorrect in the most politically absurd sense,  
The ideal of knights and maidens  
Gasped faintly,  
Choked piteously,  
Died softly,  
Not with a bang but a whimper.  
King Arthur mourned and  
Queen Victoria was not amused,  
But they're dead, too.  
No one else noticed.



## Full Circle

Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.

It is colder now  
than when I first saw  
painted turtles in the sun  
freed from winter's icy grip  
muddy ornaments draped on logs caressing spring.  
Ah, to be warm once again.

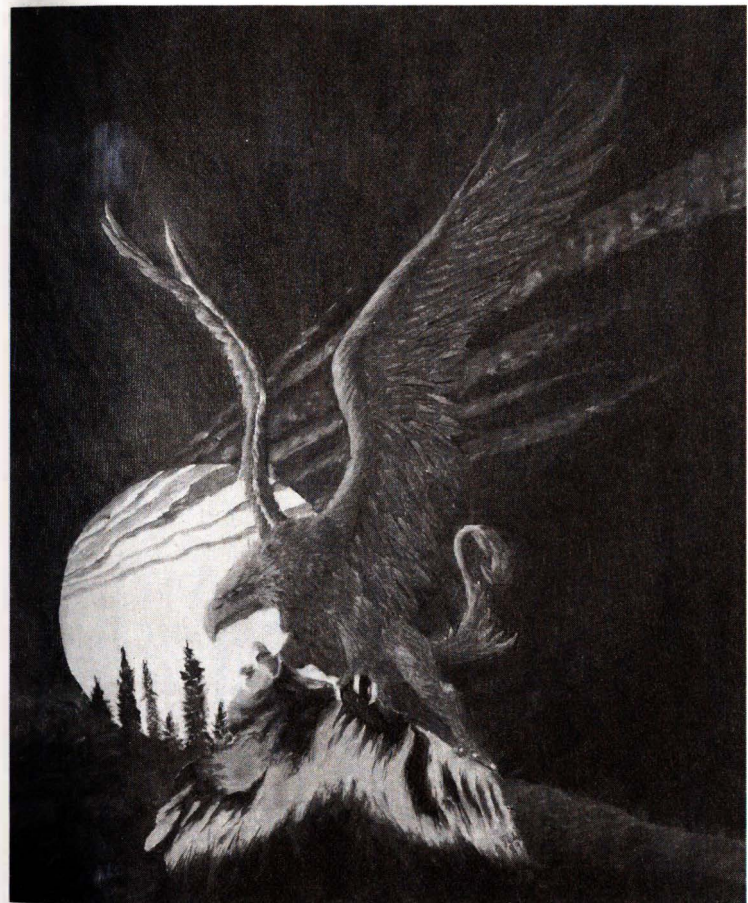
Life exploded  
in days that followed  
a busy little world giving birth  
hardly noticed my ripple as I passed.  
Cormorant, egret, heron green and great, pelicans  
followed a plan set in stone. Written long ago.

Home of grass and sticks  
territory imperative, assembled to plan, before the storm.  
Crowded aerial tenements, defying gravity  
occupants crying for fish. You fished.  
The plan worked. You gave wings.  
Now go. The storm is near.

It is quiet here now.  
Golden brown the color of life left behind.  
Marsh reeds sway. Cattails pregnant with seed.  
Laughing ripples silenced under a crystal veneer.  
Life retreats, prepares for siege, and waits  
to be warm again.

The beast is at the door  
searching for those left behind.  
In small circles, within a shrinking pond  
a pelican paddles. My eyes grow damp.  
Go now! Do you not know that  
you will die?

Life and death  
part of the plan. Those with two wings go.  
The circle closes tighter. Again.

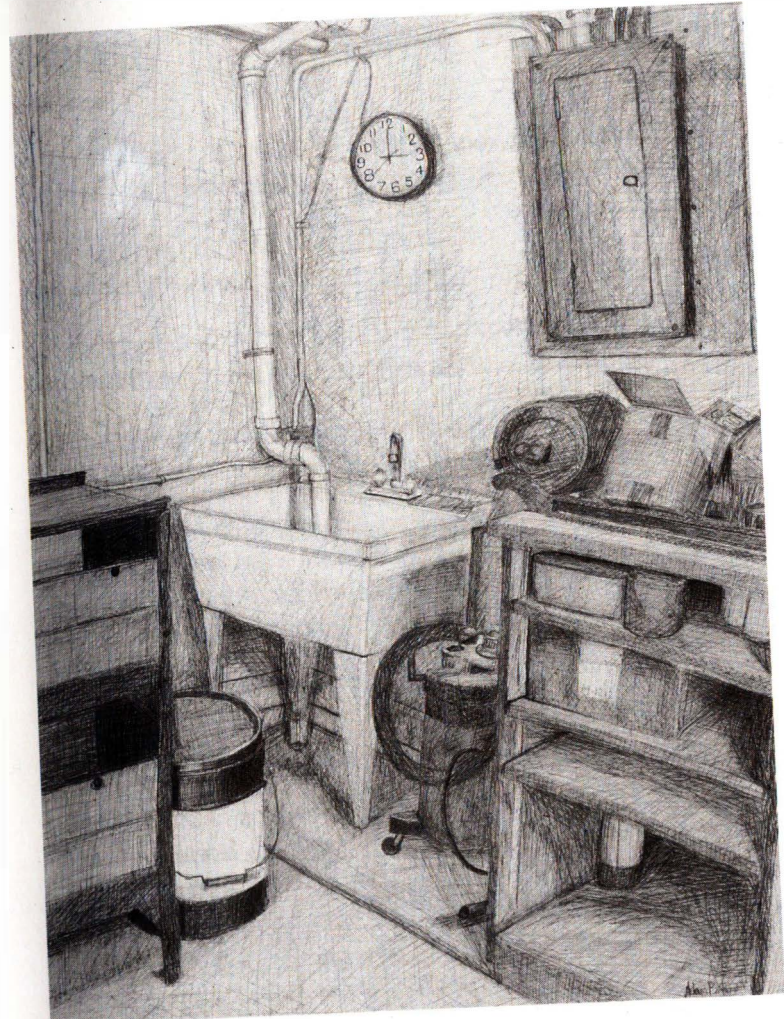


Untitled  
Woitte

## Kitchen Bitchin'

Rebecca Opstedahl

Hustle and bustle on the linoleum floor  
Skirts swaying and mouths flapping  
Clanks and clatters of pots and pans  
The blender whirrs and the oven light glares  
Snorts and giggles accompany complaints  
Stories of neglect and mayhem penetrate the pies  
*He just doesn't understand me*  
*He never takes me anywhere*  
*The only alcohol he touches is from a can*  
No fancy dinners  
No words of adoration  
No more common ground  
Hustle and bustle on the linoleum floor  
Skirts swaying and mouths flapping



Utility Room  
Adam Bertrand

## Bedtime

Chad Robinson

Slipping under the covers,  
She lies on her right,  
Turns her back to me

Sliding closer,  
Our bodies slur  
Like night into dawn

## Always

Heidi Mayer

When this world falls from its pedestal  
Into the slick black darkness of the sky

When lightning pierces through the center  
And shatters this cool blue orb on which we tread

When the pieces of the Earth fall past the stars of night  
and swirl through the ebony nothingness of space

When all things opposite cancel each other out  
And in that balance nothing of this world remains

In that midnight catacomb  
Where all the rest have faded into nothingness  
And perished in the blankness of time's deleting plague  
When all things come to their end...

There will be a silver ember  
That wraps itself around  
Whatever force brought you to me

I will meet you in a silver ember  
And we will know eternity



# I Heard That Bud Died Today

(For Ted)

Matt Stassel

I remember once as a child looking out  
Beyond the slow James River Bend  
And thinking only that you called it the "Jim,"  
Instead of James. But knowing now, more  
Appropriately, that you called him "Friend."  
I could describe the dusk that night,  
As if the sun setting into the furrows of the earth  
Were of much consolation to you,  
But you have seen one before I am sure,  
As have we all, that is uniquely yours.  
And so I ask you to remember that.  
The wind, however, I feel is more physically here.  
It touched the surface of the Jim, for instance,  
Causing a ripple to reveal itself to me.  
I watched it alone drift softly on,  
So carelessly. So unknowing of the vast  
Wide ocean that waited, gently lapping and  
Ticking the end of all rivers,  
To place an accepting kiss  
On the mouth of the river delta.  
I tried to think in words.  
I thought about what the ocean might say  
To the silted waters and the thin  
Reluctant wave of the rippling James  
As they met and clashed at the turbulent threshold.  
These seven solid words, I hope  
Will envelope more wholly than arms,  
Sounded only like waves: A quieting finger to my lips.  
Even now, as a man, I speak them as a child would.  
I heard that Bud died today.  
I love you and I am sorry.



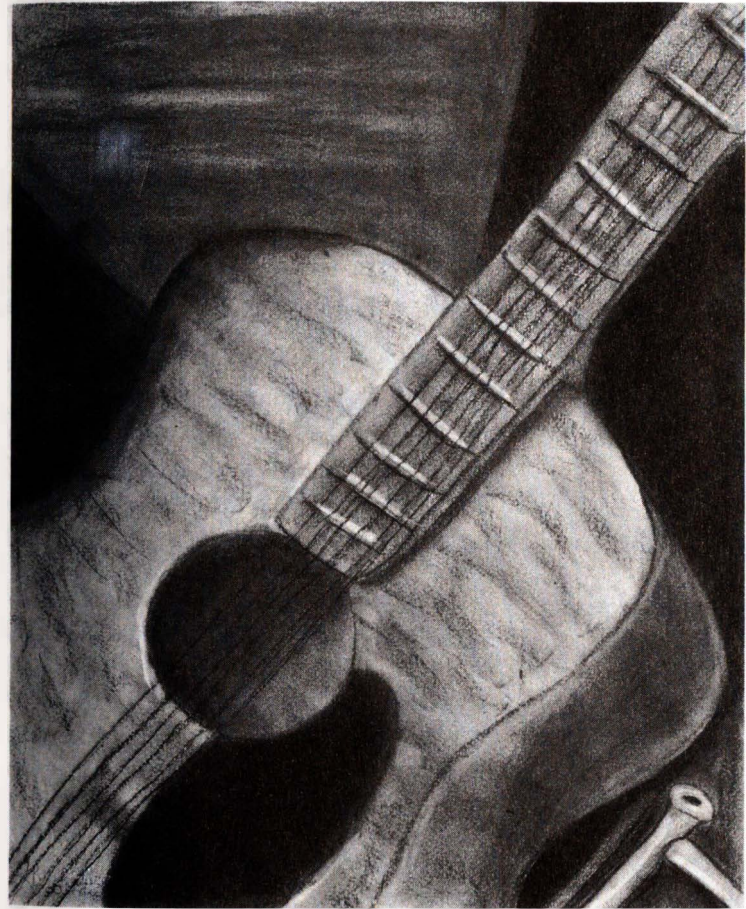
Untitled  
Joel Keickhefer



## Dad's Shoes

Chad Robinson

Like the thongs of Zeus  
At the mouth of Mount Olympus,  
They assume the power of a god.  
With childish curiosity  
And regard for their super-manliness,  
I peek at them;  
I centimeter closer to them  
On childish feet.  
I stand before them  
To see how close I come  
To filling them.



Untitled  
Lisa Bender

## Colored

Andy Moore

It's a good thing poems don't have to rhyme;  
I kind of like the colors orange and purple.

## Dandelions

Heather Murphey

The students leaned against the building, dripped  
off steps, as cigarette ash littered the grass.  
A day off school, but there was nowhere else  
to go, and nothing else to do, but sit  
as wafting smoke and dandelion fluff  
escaped into the sky. And you were gone.

I drove to Mary's house and cried with friends.  
Then Mary stopped her crying, asking me  
Which brother died? Was he the middle one?  
The school assembly covered seven stages  
of grieving. Sobs and strangled breathing filled  
the rows of theatre seats. And you were gone.

When dragged along to baccalaureate plans  
I sat in silent calm. With no adults,  
they didn't bother whispering, "What a freak!"  
I closed my aching eyes against them all.  
In silence I could hear the gentle lub dub  
of my own heart still beating. You were gone.

The funeral's sadness brought no tears for me.  
I sat in stony silence, ragged breath  
escaping through dry lips. Your broken form  
was lying in a box. And yet the sun still shone on fields  
of dandelion blooms  
Outside the church's closed door.



Untitled  
Jessica Ziegler

## Remembering '65

Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.

Sun dogs  
whimsical mirages  
dancing over branches  
in a frigid sky. Pretend dogs  
have no bite. No territory do they mark.

Ice pierced sky  
in shades of gray  
shadows fall on bed of white  
long and sharp without a sound.  
Life defined. Black and white.

Naked trees  
creak and groan  
as old men on tired legs.  
Knotted arthritic hands, abused by time  
shaped by wind. Their season passed.

Pillars of  
the community  
looking down, speaking out  
above the wind in dry and raspy voices  
seem to say spread your seed. Spread your seed.

Unashamed  
naked limbs exposed  
as a badge of courage forged in battle.  
This crack, this break, this split?  
The Storm of '65 did that, but I survived. Will survive.

Sun dogs  
beautiful people  
fade with setting sun.  
No battle won. No race was run.  
Wind blows colder. I look back, remembering '65.



## One Still Night

Katie Pavel

Full moon rises up above  
Stars shine brightly against the sky  
Silvery beams of soft light  
Dance with us as we walk  
One still night

Tree branches bend over our heads  
Frost glistens on extended limbs  
Swirls of broken leaves  
Rustle around our feet  
One still night

Voices fall to silent night  
Arms enfold in warm embrace  
Clouds of frosty breath  
Merge into a gentle kiss...  
One still night



McCrary  
Melissa Christensen

## As We Study Perfection

Megan Koch

You study the structure of buildings,  
I study the structure of a sonnet.  
Shear, scansion  
Compression, couplet  
Engineering, emotion—  
We are perfect for one another.



City  
Melissa Christensen



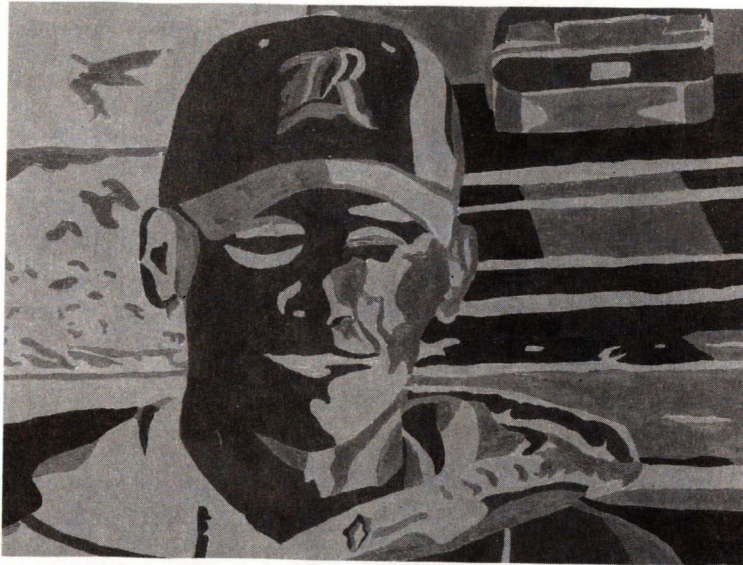
# Marie Frost

Chad Robinson

That March he was six weeks old  
When I heard the death rattle in his throat.  
I rocked him, fed him warm milk,  
Held him close to calm his bawling  
But to no good.  
Howard didn't believe in doctors;  
Faith will heal you if there's enough  
In the cupboard, he always said;  
Besides, we couldn't afford it.  
Anyway why, I laid poor John Mark down  
And later when I gathered his limp body  
In my arms he cried, but little Carol said,  
Mama, John Mark isn't crying, you are.  
I wrapped him in a blanket and ran to  
Mrs. Ice, the nurse across the street,  
Who said he was as blue as the snow falling.  
The doctors couldn't save him either.  
I made them air it on the radio when it happened  
So Mom and Dad in Harold would know.  
All these years I have been telling everyone  
How beautiful the day the funeral was.  
But no one knows a plow had to come in  
To shovel the snow, and a crane had to  
Dig the frozen ground and tuck him in.  
I wouldn't let my other six near  
The cemetery on the hill and  
Witness such a hellish scene.  
But I don't blame anybody.



Boy  
Artist Unknown



Untitled  
Adam Robinson

## Taking a Child to Her First Ball Game

Ricky Ganci

Her eyes alight as the stadium lights  
Present the green field before her.  
She gasps,  
As we all did the first time.  
Because she didn't realize before  
What it is to hear it all first hand  
Rather than reconstructed images and  
Tedious commentary  
The child's eyes see the child's game  
Played by the men I still idolize  
And she will, before tonight is over.  
She grabs my hand tightly  
And falls in love with the game  
As bats crack and balls smack  
Into gloves and outfield seats.  
Her smiling lips part, and she giggles  
Every time she hears it.  
Pinstripes speak to her of what  
We have just entered. She  
Now knows it's real, different from the  
Cartoons, and all the things she'll see  
As she gets older.  
The eyes she'll grow into  
To watch of romance and war  
To read of all the things she will  
That will take hold of her imagination  
Yet she will always look at baseball  
With the eyes she looks with now.

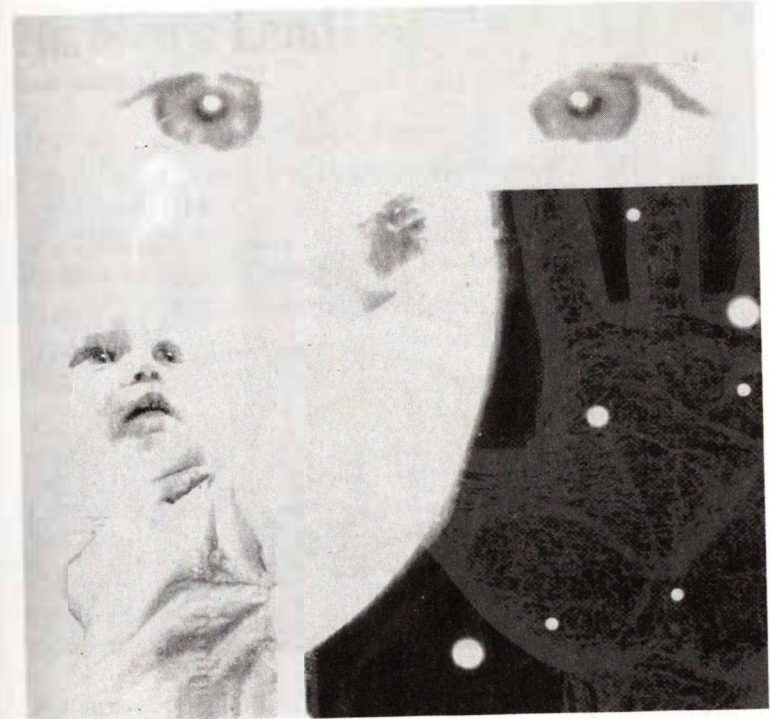
# The Wall

Chad Robinson

I imagine him sitting there,  
the fire in front of him  
tonguing the wall.

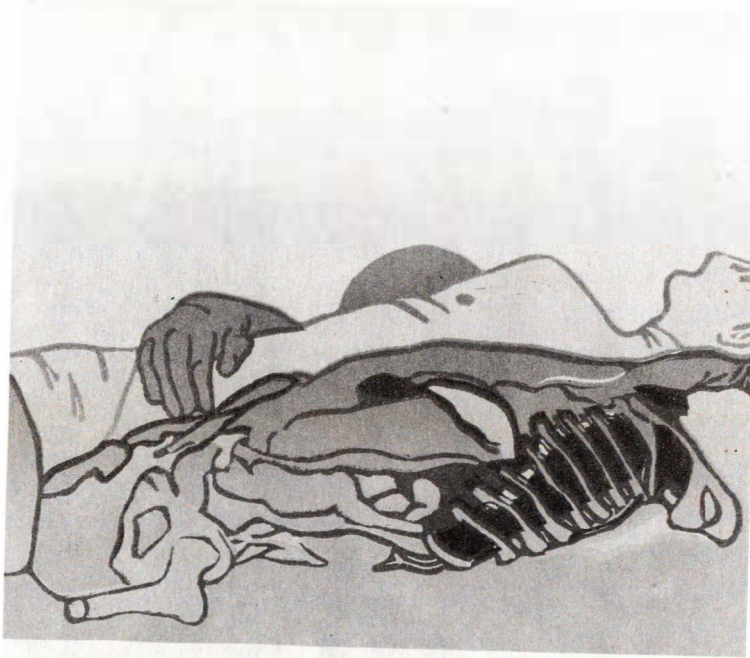
He sees within the cracks  
and pits of the cave wall  
momentary photos that burn  
onto the glassy pupils of his eyes:  
herds of buffalo tromping in  
the dust of a prairie afternoon;  
deer chewing circularly among  
the brush, jerking their heads,  
listening to the silence, jaws  
locked, and the relaxation of  
chewing again.

I imagine he finds some  
cool ash left over from  
the warmth of another night,  
And as his cracked canvas  
waves and flits in  
the light of the flames,  
he dips his forefinger  
into the black powder,  
presses, and slowly begins  
to draw.



Child  
Robert Bern





Bodyscape  
Adam Robinson

## No Man's Land

Louis Whitehead

An empty overcast sky looms above  
thousands of broken and bloodied bodies strewn across the  
scorched earth  
This land, once a place of life, is now a place of death  
This land, once so full of life  
Now sleeps fitfully under the ashes of its former self  
Only time will tell if this land and the hearts of many nations will  
rise again, like the phoenix  
From the ashes of their former life

Like the sky, like life, the world is awash in gray  
There is no black and white here  
The green of life has been flushed away  
The unnamed brothers in arms scattered across the sterile  
bleakness  
Make us count the cost of the price that they paid

Perhaps at one time, on this field of battle  
Flowers grew, children played, and couples made love in the  
sun's warmth  
Now, in the aftermath of death and destruction, nothing lives or  
grows here  
Someday perhaps, the rains of a new day  
will wash the pain and suffering away from this countryside  
And from the seeds of sorrow will a new life and a new world  
begin

## Found Guilty by Professorial Jury

Patrick Grode

Crimson blood streaked the carefully typed sheets.  
I didn't expect him to understand;  
Still, it was a shock—my passionate work slain  
For loving unpopular traditions.  
Out in the sunset, education meets  
Calm cosmic beauty. Sometimes, our small hands  
Can touch both; but my hands cannot explain  
Sunsets to academic Inquisitions.  
Within these walls, no fiery dove heats  
Cynical snowmen, no Narnia-esque lands  
Plait their dreams boldly in the Lions mane.  
Dreams, it seems, are fanciful positions.  
And therefore, I found little to be said.  
I buried the pages—but they were not dead.

Prose

## Cigar Smoke

Katie Pavel

Huge flakes of wet snow tumbled down between the canyon walls to the bending road below and packed onto the tires of Shelby's forest green and tan Outback. She had already slipped the car into four-wheel drive, but she still had to fight to keep the vehicle from heading into the ditch. She swore under her breath as she leaned forward in her seat and gripped the steering wheel with both hands.

"Do you want me to take over?" Logan, her husband, asked from the passenger seat.

"Are you kidding?" she retorted in exasperation. "If we stop now, we'll never get going again." She squinted at the snow, wishing that it would let up. April storms like these were common, and she had known that it had been coming all day. The radio announcer had warned of it, as she and Logan had made their way across the state from Sioux Falls. However, Shelby had simply hoped that the weather would hold until they had made it. When they had stopped for dinner at her parent's house in Rapid City, both her father and mother had tried to convince her to spend the night and then continue on to Deadwood with the entire family the next day when the weather was supposed to improve. Shelby, however, had persisted that she wanted to continue on, and Logan had abided, understanding her strong desire to visit the house before everyone else arrived with boxes and moving trucks. Besides, as she had tried to convince her worried mother, Deadwood was only about an hour's drive from Rapid, and she had driven the steep roadways of the Black Hills in hundreds of storms since her teens. They would have no problem making it to her grandfather's house.

By the time the wind swept the snow in swirls before the car's headlights for the thousandth time, however, Shelby's previous optimism had vanished. It had not taken her long to realize that, after having lived in the flat eastern part of the state for the last ten years, she had lost her skills of driving on the treacherous winter roads of the Hills. Perhaps they should have waited, she thought briefly to herself as she strained to see through the

snow. She then clenched her teeth, knowing that it was too late to turn back now.

After what seemed like an eternity, the high canyon walls finally parted, revealing the town of Deadwood. Shelby let out a sigh of relief as she eased the car through the narrow, snow-packed streets. She drove past the historical, cobblestoned avenue of Main Street, where, despite the cold weather, people were still rushing along the sidewalks on their way to the expensive restaurants and hotels. After passing several of the city's museums and parks, she slowly steered the car up the steep, familiar street to the house that had held so many of her childhood memories.

Thoughts of her grandfather's death had resurfaced in Shelby's mind when her mother had called to tell her that the family had decided to put her grandfather's house up for sale. Within the next couple of weeks, her mother had explained, they would be moving everything out of the house and cleaning up the property so that it would be ready to sell by early May. Shelby had been shocked to even fathom the thought of selling the wonderful old house. It had been her favorite place to visit during her childhood. Whenever she had visited, her grandfather had always been working in the woodshop or rummaging through his gardening shed for clippers or seeds. On numerous hot summer days, the two of them had sat on the front porch with tall, sweating glasses of lemonade and a puzzle spread out on a card table. They had laughed and worked on the puzzle all afternoon until it finally had become cool enough to take a walk downtown to the ice cream parlor. Such wonderful times she had spent with her grandfather. Such wonderful memories she had carried with her after his death. And now she feared that they would all be taken away when the house was sold.

"I'll get the bags," Logan said, pulling on gloves and a hat as she slid the car into the slippery driveway of the house. "You go ahead inside."

She reached over and put her hand on his arm. "Thank you for agreeing to come here tonight."

He smiled and leaned over to give her a kiss before climbing out of the car. "I know what this place means to you. Now, go

ahead inside and call your mom. I'm sure she's worried sick about us."

Shelby quickly shuffled through the deep snow covering the sidewalk and climbed the steps to the front door. A great flurry of emotions swept over her as she realized that this would be the last time she stepped into the house before all of her grandfather's belongings were boxed up and taken away. She shuddered, trying to rid her mind of its nostalgia, and unlocked the door. Stepping inside, she swept her hand against the wall until she found the light switch and flicked it on. The small foyer lit up, revealing islands of dusty, sheet-covered furniture in the adjacent room and a stack of empty moving boxes in the corner. Sighing, she shook the snow from her coat and started to remove it. However, an instant chill rushed through her thin sweater and she decided to keep it on.

Logan quickly came in behind her and set their bags on the floor. "That old furnace must not hold up like it used to," he commented about the cold rooms.

Shelby nodded. "It never really did heat the entire house. That's why Grandpa always had the fire going during the winter."

"I'll go see if there's any wood in the shed out back," Logan said, already heading in that direction.

Shelby stepped through the foyer into the kitchen and, setting her purse on the table, pulled out her cell phone. She was talking to her mother when Logan returned with an armful of wood. By the time she had gotten off the phone, he had already started a fire. He smiled at her as she came into the living room and stood with him before the fireplace as the warmth from it started to fill the room. "Was she worried?"

"Oh, you know my mother," she sighed. "She frets about everything, especially when it has to do with me." Logan chuckled. "She said that she and Dad and the rest of the family would be up here sometime tomorrow morning to help with the packing. They want to get most of Grandpa's stuff moved out tomorrow," she continued, a slight hint of contempt entering her voice.

Logan put his arm around her and squeezed her shoulder. "Shelby, you have to at least somewhat understand why your

mom and aunts are selling the house."

She looked at the floor. "Yes, I know," she mumbled. Her family was not rich, and she knew that they could not afford to keep the house. They could make good money off the property, with it being located in a prime residential area. "I guess I'm just not ready to let it go as easily as everyone else," she murmured.

"Understandably so," Logan responded. "Your grandfather loved you very much." He brushed a curl of her red hair from her face. "Tell you what, why don't you just relax, and I'll go take our things to the bedroom and then make some coffee."

Shelby smiled a thank-you. She then removed the sheets that were covering the largest sofa. Sinking down onto the old cushions, she stared at the flames in the fireplace and melted away as her mind filled with thoughts and the memories of her grandfather. She had been everything to him, his only granddaughter. She remembered how she had spent many a night on his lap on that very sofa as he had read to her. She could have stayed curled up with him forever, listening to his deep voice and breathing in the faint smell of cigar smoke that always seemed to linger on him. She had loved that smell as a child, and even now she always thought of him when she smelled the distinct scent.

The steps of Logan's feet on the stairs brought Shelby back to the present. She looked up at him as he rounded the corner of the hallway. He was carrying a box, which he set down on the sofa beside her. "I found these up in the bedroom. I thought you might like to look through them."

Shelby opened the box. "Oh, Grandpa's photo albums!" Picking up the album on the top, she flipped open the worn, leather cover and started skimming through the old photographs. She had loved to look at the pictures as a child and had always wanted to know when each one had been taken. Her grandfather had never tired of telling her the stories of his life in those photos, and she had never tired of hearing them.

"Now that's the smile I've been waiting to see all night," Logan replied, returning from the kitchen with two steaming cups of coffee.

"This certainly has helped to brighten my mood," Shelby commented, scooting over on the sofa to give him room to sit down. She took the cup he offered and sipped the hot, black liquid, taking in the warmth that seemed to fill her entire body with happiness.

Logan turned the album so he could get a better look at the photos. "When was this one taken?"

"That was when Grandpa was in the service during the War. Did you know that he was over in France for close to three years? At one point, it was assumed that he had been killed in action, because they couldn't find him or the rest of his regiment for weeks. Then suddenly they had just turned up somewhere near Valognes. Grandpa said that his company had been scattered all over France during the air drops, and it had been simply by luck that they hadn't been taken as POW's."

Logan flipped to a picture of her grandfather and grandmother standing in front of a tall, two-story barn. "Was this after your grandparents had bought your family's old farm?"

"Yeah, that was right after all the neighbors had come over and helped with the barn raising. Grandpa had been so proud of that barn. It had nearly broken his heart when he had had to sell the farm after Grandma died. But I hear that the people who own it now are taking really good care of the place, and I think they even restored the barn, after the windstorm two years ago damaged it pretty badly."

They continued to look at the albums into the late hours of the night, and Shelby excitedly told the story behind each and every photo. Her eyes sparkled as she joyfully pondered each memory, and, before long, all of the books were scattered out on the floor before them. Exhausted, Shelby leaned back against the sofa and let out a sigh of complete contentment.

"Feeling better?" Logan asked, putting his arm around her.

She leaned against his shoulder and smiled. "Yes. Thank you for finding these. I think I'll be OK now. I'll still miss the old house, but I'll have these photos and memories of Grandpa to hold on to. I guess I had forgotten that this place had only been a small part of Grandpa's life. Maybe that's why Mom and my aunts don't feel the way I do about selling it. They just have

different memories of Grandpa, like on the farm and all."

"That's true, and just like they haven't forgotten their memories, I doubt you'll forget yours of spending time with your grandfather here."

Shelby nodded. "I just wish I could find the picture of this house," she sadly sighed. "I thought one had been taken of it with Grandpa and me sitting on the front porch, but I didn't see it."

"I'm sure it will turn up sometime. We'll probably find it tomorrow when we start packing everything away."

"Yeah, we probably will," Shelby agreed tiredly, resting her head against Logan's shoulder.

"Do you want to go to bed?" he asked, noticing how late it was.

"No. Let's just stay here and relax for a bit longer if that's all right," she murmured quietly. "It's so nice and warm down here." She snuggled closer to him and sleepily gazed at the fireplace. Within minutes, she had drifted off to sleep.

When Shelby awoke several hours later, the fire had lessened to a glowing mound of smoldering wood. The room was not nearly as warm as it had been earlier and Shelby quietly stood and went over to the fireplace. Placing another log on the fire, she poked at the mounds of wood until the flames finally began to grow again. Then, kneeling on the floor, she gathered all the albums together and put them back in the box.

When she lifted the lid to close the box, she noticed a photograph was lying on the floor. Slowly, she reached over and picked up the tiny picture. Her breath quickened with excitement as she realized what was on it. The old house filled the photo, and on the small front porch sat her grandfather and herself as an eight-year-old. She sat back on her ankles and stared at the picture. How come she hadn't seen it earlier that evening? She was sure that she had looked through all the albums. She glanced over at Logan, who was still asleep. He couldn't have found it. Surely he would have told her if he had. She stayed on the floor for several minutes longer, wondering where on earth the picture had come from.

Only when she finally rose to her feet did she realize that the scent of cigar smoke filled the room...

## Optical Thermodynamics

Patrick Grode

Be thankful you don't understand darkness. The darkness you know is dead. It only moves and breathes in your imagination, and the worst specters that inhabit it are shoes and rumpled bath robes behind half-closed closet doors.

We fear the dark because it hides monsters. But perhaps the monsters aren't what we should be afraid of.

Now that's ridiculous, you're thinking, and maybe you're right.

The darkness you know is dead.

In the Black Hills National Forest west of Lead, there are trail systems that skirt the rims of steep canyons. Narrow deer paths lead down sharp drops and, at the bottom, the valiant hiker finds a chilly creek. Ponderosa pines fade into aspen stands along the water. The trees are so thick that sunlight seldom gains more than a foothold.

My sister and I once camped in those woods. She was an obvious greenhorn. We trudged up hills and through sunlit meadows, pausing now and then to consult a Forest Service topo map and my old Boy Scout compass. I taught Mary how to orient the map, pointing out with a good-natured grin that you don't learn such things in Girl Scouts. But then, Mary responded, if you're in Girl Scouts, you don't have to be around boys.

I didn't know then how good it feels to have the embrace of sunshine on your face or the joy of having to squint for the brightness. Or the comfort of being around those who love you.

We pitched camp a little off the trail, about two hundred feet from the edge of one of the canyons. Shadows lengthened as we cooked supper. The small flame of the stove sparked orange reflections off our tin cups. We captured our gourmet chicken and rice on film for posterity, but doubted the camera would adequately convey its freeze-dried blandness. Then we played gin rummy by candlelight.

Mary complained that I was too lucky and that she never

sends the information to the brain to be processed and catalogued. This is how we see a monster, because a monster is a thing which reflects light.

So what do you call a non-thing that reflects no light?

When I turned, my flashlight hit a patch of darkness it could not penetrate, and a pair of eyes grimmer than ebony stared hungrily at me from the consuming black. More than anything else, those eyes haunt me. Imagine staring into a mirror and expecting to see a reflection, but instead discovering that the mirror devours your image. Can you picture that? I wish I couldn't.

Then I was wrapped in coldness, and I began to stumble to get away from... I don't know what. Talons of nothingness sunk into my shoulders, piercing a part of me that I can't even name, the part that lights fireworks on Independence Day and likes popcorn at the movies and really wants a long, slow kiss with Halle Berry.

Perhaps the absence of energy can become so acute that it takes on its own existence, and such an existence burns with desire to absorb that which it lacks. Perhaps coldness can become so cold that it hungers for warmth. That it hunts warmth. That it would kill for warmth.

I tripped and fell into something hot and liquid.

I don't know why I'm still alive. Can a person live after they've been sapped of all that is light and warmth and energy?

When I awoke, I was in a sleeping bag on the grass.

If we had nothing of energy left within us, what would we become?

Mary found me half-submerged in the creek.

Can we become so cold that ice feels warm?

It's really a wonder I didn't drown. I had severe hypothermia, which isn't surprising, considering that I was lying in forty-degree water. Mary had rolled me into a sleeping bag for warmth.

Even hypothermia seemed merciful. I don't know why I'm still alive. Perhaps the creek kept me warm enough to survive, or perhaps the sun slew the dark forest night just in time. The shade by the creek wasn't bright enough to be reassuring.

I told Mary that I must have fallen over the rim of the canyon and rolled down the slope. I must have been knocked out when I landed in the creek and had lain there unconscious until she awoke in the morning and went looking for me.

I don't think she believes me, but what else could I say?

Be thankful you don't understand darkness, that for you, it's only something that hides monsters and makes you stumble over chairs. Be thankful that the darkness you know is dead, and only moves in your imagination.

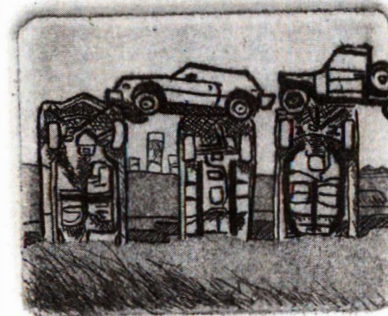
Pray that if you ever see eyes in the darkness, watching you, that they are glowing red.

Do you wonder that I sleep with a lamp on?





BLACK HILLS' GLORY 2/6 Meland



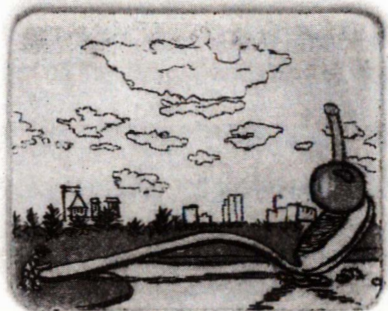
ALLIANCE'S CARHENSE 2/6 Meland



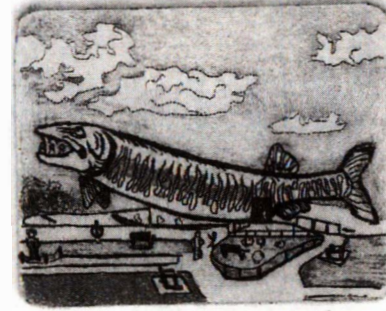
MURDO'S MEMORY 2/6 Meland



BEMIDJI'S LEGEND 2/6 Meland

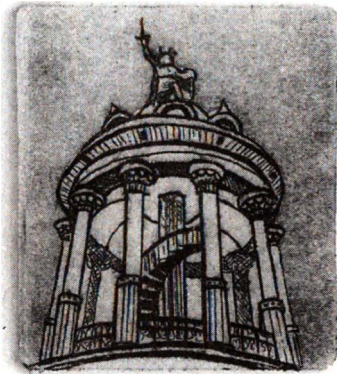


MINNEAPOLIS CHERRY 2/6 Meland

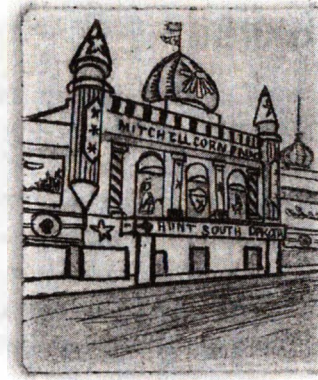


HAYWARD HALL 2/6 Meland

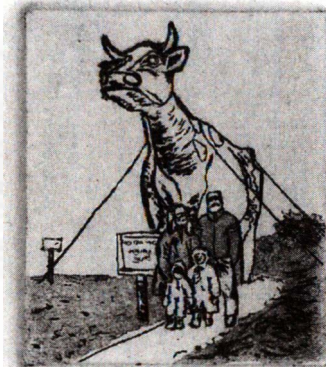




NEW ULM'S GERMAN  $\frac{2}{6}$  Meland



MITCHELL'S PALACE  $\frac{2}{6}$  Meland



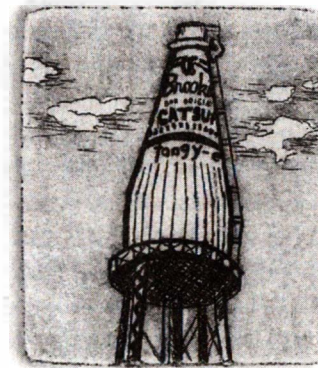
SALEM SUE  $\frac{2}{6}$  Meland



JAMESTOWN'S BISON  $\frac{2}{6}$  Meland



BLUE EARTH'S GIANT  $\frac{2}{6}$  Meland



COLLINSVILLE'S TOWER  $\frac{2}{6}$  Meland

# Silently Studied

Karen Boegler

"Want some help, Mom?" I ask, picking up the cutting board from the kitchen counter.

"Sure," she replies with a pleased look. "There's some carrots there you can start with, and the green peppers—about a cup or so of each should do." Then with a slight pause, adding, "And don't forget to wash your hands." The sleeves of my mother's white "Saturday sweatshirt" are pushed up past her elbows, forming two puffy white caps just below her shoulders. With her hands, she traces the foreign language of her recipe book; in her head she translates cups and teaspoons into sour and salty, sweet and bitter. My hands follow hers, mimicking their silent dance. I have spent a lifetime learning from my mother.

Even without knowing us, an observer could easily determine our relationship at first sight. Although my mother is nearly five inches taller and thirty-two years older than I, the physical similarities between us are too many to ignore. The way the sun lights my hair, the shiny cobalt blue of my eyes, the ivory tone of my skin, and the slightly upturned slope of my nose are near exact copies of my mother's, a fact which has always given me an unspoken happiness.

Continuing to work silently beside her, mulling over my own thoughts, I wonder what she is thinking, as I often do. Perhaps owing to the fact that we share the same often-quiet nature, I know that her silence often belies the many thoughts which never leave the recesses of her mind. She is most likely far from the cooking preparations at hand, as I am at the same moment.

I find myself doing this often studying my mother's expressions, and trying to piece together what she might be thinking. Although it has been several years, I can still recall a time when I asked her what she would most like to be doing at that very moment. And although I have forgotten her reply, I will never forget the telling look which crossed her face that made me wonder if she had thought of how her life would turn out years ago and suddenly realized that it is not like she had

"Do you want to read after this?" she asks, breaking me from my reverie.

"Sure," I reply automatically. Still lost in the memories of my childhood, I remember how my mother used to read to my sisters and me before we crawled into bed. The *BFG* one month, *The Witches* the next. Sitting around her at the kitchen table and drinking homemade chocolate milkshakes, we would listen and wonder what would happen next. To this day, in fact, my favorite author is Roald Dahl, and one of my favorite pastimes is curling up to read a good book in the company of my mother.

I have many memories like these—loving memories of my mother sewing my dolls new clothes, weeping silently at my sister's wedding, reciting my bedtime prayers with me when I forgot the words, hugging me just as I began to cry, listening to my plans, my worries, my fears...

As I finish and put my knife aside, my mother glances over and I smile, wondering if she's reading my mind. I wonder if she knows how much I love her, so much that I am compelled to study her every movement and gesture, memorize her every asset and fault, and make them my own. Women have told me you turn into your mother as you age. I, for one, can't wait.

# The Weekend

Katie Pavel

Natalie smiled as she pulled up alongside the campfire. She was glad that she had decided to come. Another week of hell had ended at last. Work had completely burned her out and her boss had been his usual self, a complete ass. Oh, she needed to find another job! But it was something at least, she forced herself to remember. After all, one must make car payments and pay off college loans. Well, she was going to forget work for this weekend, she promised herself. Meg, one of Natalie's friends, had invited her to spend the weekend camping with a large group of college buddies, and Natalie was determined to enjoy herself, clear her head, and get a break from reality. If that was possible. It certainly seemed so as she climbed out of her car and felt a reviving nip of frosty air against her cheek. Yes, this weekend was going to be well worth it, Natalie thought.

Meg was standing by the fire, and, when she saw Natalie approach, she walked up to her and gave her a warm hug. "Natalie! You decided to come! I wasn't sure if you'd make it. How was your week?"

Natalie rolled her eyes. "Ugh, let's not even go there!" she groaned. "I swear, someone's going to die, either me or my boss. Would you believe that he gave me four deadlines this week alone? Four! And he gave me the last two on Thursday, so I've been putting in major overtime to get them all done. That's why I'm so late!" She thumped down on a log with a huff and shook her head despairingly. "I don't even want to think about Monday."

"Well," Meg said, squeezing her friend's shoulder, "maybe you'll be able to have some fun this weekend."

Natalie's sour expression melted away and she gave a small smile. "Yes, I think so. Oh, I'm sorry for complaining! Thank you for inviting me."

Meg smiled and went to get Natalie a drink. Natalie settled herself on a log before the crackling blaze and let all her frustrations and tensions burn away in the smoke. Before long, she was laughing and enjoying herself like she had not had the opportunity to do for so long. As the crisp, cold night closed in

around the group, Natalie snuggled closer to the fire and her friends, happily forgetting her worries and believing that this weekend would be the best she had had since forever.

They were roasting marshmallows when a figure appeared and sat down across the fire from her. Natalie did not notice him for a moment, too busy with burning one side of her marshmallow a golden, crackling brown. When finally she did look up and met his gaze, her eyes flashed in surprise and then smoldered into blue flames. He cautiously held her stare and attempted a small smile. She immediately went back to her marshmallow, but by this time it had turned into a gooey, black mess that finally dripped from her stick and splattered in the fire. Completely disgusted, she handed her stick over to Meg and left the campfire, trudging into the darkness.

She found a barely-visible, leaf-covered path and followed it, trying to concentrate more on it than the figure she had left behind. After being close to the fire for so long, she hadn't realized how cold the night had become, and she immediately felt the difference and imagined that she could actually see the rays of warmth leaving her body. Yet what bodily warmth she was losing was replaced by the burning from deeper within, and she kindled it as much as possible as she marched up the steep path and crested the hill. The forest opened onto a small meadow and Natalie paused, catching her breath and noticing for the first time the scenery around her. Moonlight drifted down onto the knolls, reflecting off the grasses and creating a hazy sheen of blue. The stars flickered brightly in the intensely black sky and seemed to contribute to the silvery glow. Natalie shuddered and found a rock to sit on. Maybe if she stayed here for awhile, she would be able to cool off.

Ten minutes passed before the figure again appeared. He slowly walked up to her and found a place to sit beside her. Fuming within, she tried to ignore him, and the two sat in cold silence.

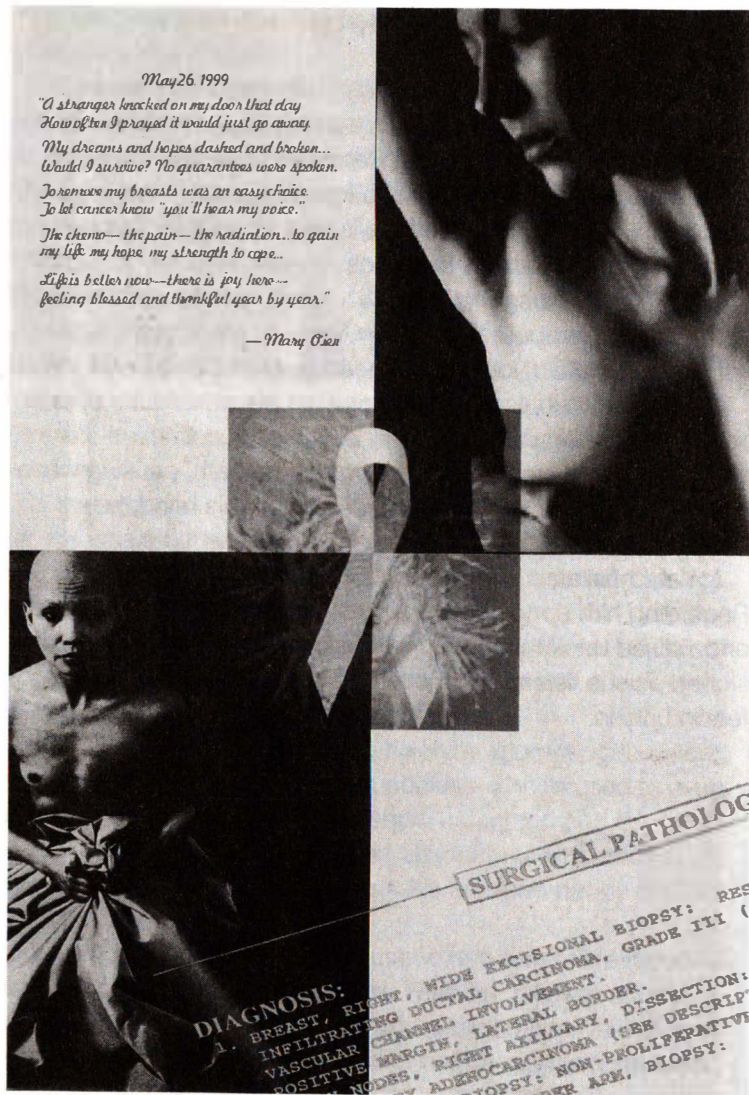
"How are you?" he finally attempted.

"Fine," she answered icily, wrapping her coat tighter around her shivering body.

He tried again.

"I've been meaning to call you, Nattie..."





Breast Cancer  
Casey Gregerson

## A Country Beyond the Stars

Todd VanDerWerff

Father Robert Shih clawed at the holy iron shackle of white, fastened about his neck, his cloak dragging on a floor covered in dim sweat and garbage. All down the hall, he could hear the cry of the boeschkes, wailing to the moon, talking to dead relatives, crying for long ago days before the nanobots.

Sometimes, Shih wished for those days. He had outlived his entire family only to find that he would outlive them even more. Dull memories of his mother calling for him in her native Cantonese haunted the back rooms of his memory and he recalled the last time he ever saw her, when she stared at him with tear-filled brown eyes, asking how he could abandon his family and their faith for this *American religion*.

This had all happened over 600 years ago.

The sound of the boeschkes' crying crawled up the walls, plummeted down from the ceiling, assaulting his ears. A foul stench imprinted itself on his cloak. It would be a long evening of washing tonight at the church.

At the end of the hall, Shih found the room the owners of the cerebrecio had asked him to visit. Rapping firmly on the door, Shih found it to swing open at his touch. He entered the room, feeling the air gritty against his skin, crunching in his teeth.

When he saw the man lying on the bed, he started.

"Hello, Father," said the man on the bed.

"Alvin Moritz...such a surprise," Shih said, balancing himself against the door. The thought of Moritz in a cerebrecio—as a common boeschke—appalled him.

"Most people are shocked to find me in here. I certainly didn't request it. I'm certainly not one of the boeschkes."

Shih steadied himself on a brittle chair, fearing it may snap like a twig at any instant. Drips of water from the ceiling rolled off his forehead, one making its way over his lips. The cold wet had the taste of sterility.

"Why did you call for me, Mr. Moritz?"

"I want to die, Father Shih. I have Cancer, you see. Cancer in my brain. The doctors can't tell me why the nanobots haven't fixed it yet. They say it's something of a reverse-miracle. Of

course, they want me to go in for surgery so they can eradicate it and send me on my way with a brand new set of 'bots, but I've decided I'm quite sure I want to die."

Shih dug through his cerebral cortex and briefly found himself haunted by memories of his training. They flitted away, replaced by the moment.

"Why do you require the church, Mr. Moritz?"

"Please... call me Alvin. I require the assistance of the church because I want to die in dignity and honor. I want to set my soul right with God."

Shih could not understand. He knew that organized religion had filled a necessary function in the lives of people at one time. He had joined the Order because he believed he could do some good in the world. Now that man had become immortal, the church continued to slowly die. Few attended his masses anymore, even though his was the only church still open in all of Burlington, the largest city in the Western Hemisphere. Men and women had no need for religion in a world without death, a utopian dystopia.

"I'm tired of life, Father...?"

"Shih."

"Shih... I'm a scientist, as you are probably well aware, and I am very curious about what is after this. Perhaps nothing exists, but I have long toyed with the notion of a country beyond the stars, outside of our world. I want to know if it is there." Moritz curled himself up in the corner of his bed, looking out at the sun, beaming through the window, dancing a soft ballet with his brown-stained sheets.

The smell grew powerful around them—too powerful for Shih. "Are you able to leave, Mr. Moritz? I would like to go outside with you, if that is possible,"

"I certainly can. The sunshine would feel good today."

He stood up, strong and powerful, though Shih could notice an almost imperceptible slumping of the face, as though it were going to melt off like hot wax. Moritz's young body trembled with the effort and he had to lean against the wall. Shih opened the door and the cacophonous moaning wafted in.

"I'm sorry. I must apologize for my condition. It has been painful."

"I'm sure it has, Mr Moritz." Shih did not know how to act around a myth. He stood stiffly, not even thinking of lending a hand, lest he be burned somehow by the man who had conquered death.

Moritz struggled to his feet and finally stood, tall and powerful, his body conjuring images of Goliath of Gath. Shih smiled to himself. He hadn't thought of that story in years.

Together, the two men fell side by side and trudged down the hall, heading towards the sunshine and out of the government-sanctioned Hell.

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To fill his time, Shih volunteered at the local school. He helped with the third grade as he continued to believe that was the year when children remained impressionable but were beginning to have the rough spark of independence. He came to know and love each of the 20 children in every class that came his way. He, too, learned things, renewing his understanding of history and his own God. He continued to believe because of the children, though it made him feel trite.

As he strolled down the boulevard with Moritz, bright sunlight glinting off the majestic buildings that stretched for miles, Shih recalled the facts drilled into every third grader's brain early and often.

"Alvin Moritz invented the nanobots that constantly repair our cells and kill viruses, keeping us healthy and helping us stay alive," hundreds of bright young faces had said hundreds of times, the eons gobbling up their individuality, compressing them like clay into one child with one voice, singing the story of history like a sweet jingle-jangle in his ear.

Moritz seemed happy to be outside, watching all the people who were ultimately his children going about their business. He danced through the falling leaves, kicking them up in great swirls of color caught by a cool breeze that kissed his body, chasing itself across his chest.

Shih had always had trouble with October, now that it did not smell like smoke. The nanobots cleaned the fallen leaves. The nanobots created food. The nanobots did everything and everyone was happy but those who were seekers, stuck on



Earth. He longed for rocket ships to take him to otherworldly Elysian fields, but he was needed here for people like Alvin Moritz.

Moritz hummed a half-forgotten tune and clicked his tongue, delighting in sights and sounds.

"I've been in there too damn long," Moritz said. "Five years of fighting them off is too much. I should have just left years ago."

"Who put you in there?"

"My wife, of course. She thought if I was in there with the boeschkes for a while, I would get this crazy notion of dying out of my head and go back to her."

"How long have you been married?"

"Oh...628 years...assuming she hasn't declared independence from me by now. It's a long time to be married to a person. You learn things you shouldn't know about each other's souls, but you also find that love grows to deep places you'd never even dreamed of. I've always felt kind of sad for what I inflicted on the world, but she always knew how to make me feel better."

"Love can do that. I would agree."

"Who do you have?"

"My family...my family died in the war. They were in San Francisco when it died. And, naturally, I'm not married. All I have are the kids at the school and my parishioners?"

"You still have parishioners?"

"Some."

They fell into silence again, allowing rays of dying sun to become their company. Shih could see from the way that Moritz slumped as he walked that the end was crawling up on him.

"If you'll excuse me, Alvin, how did you come to have cancer?"

"I found it easy, really. I simply got a hold of some spare nanobots that I found in the supply room and programmed them to make some cancer for me. Then I had them put it on my brain and now they guard it against the other nanobots. It was the first plan I came up with that worked. Overriding my creation proved a bit harder than suspected."

A long pause dominated the darkness.

"Alvin, I don't know if I can help you die. The church

doesn't tolerate suicide. Had the cancer come about by natural means..."

"How can you say that?! The cancer could never have come about by natural means! And how can the church be for everlasting life here on Earth!? Whatever happened to the Second Coming and eternity with the cherubim!?"

"We don't speak on that much anymore. People don't want to hear it. And what if the Buddhists were right about when you die, your soul just enters a long line of souls, waiting to be reborn, but finding it impossible because of you. And then after a long epoch or so, you are reborn and you simply live to be an immortal again?"

Moritz was quiet for a long time. Then words fell out of his mouth, slowly tripping off his tongue and falling like silver upon the sidewalk.

"Have you heard the story of when the world learned of the nanobots?"

"Of course. I've *heard* it thousands of times." Shih was not kidding. He remained surprised by how many hyperboles became realities the longer one lived.

"But you've never 'heard' it. Until now, you've only listened to it. Allow me to tell you how it was."

The two had stopped at a park bench buried amongst the glittering jewels that jutted to Heaven. Moritz sat down with a huff and Shih joined him.

"As a very young man, I vowed to overcome death. I don't know why. I didn't lose a mother like Dr. Frankenstein or anything. I simply thought death was unfair, God's ultimate advantage. I became vain enough to believe that science had surpassed God in every way. I was wrong to think that."

"If you'll excuse me, Alvin, you're an atheist, aren't I right? A long avowed one, in fact."

"A lapsed Catholic is more like it. I came to terms some time ago with the fact that there is real good and real evil in the world and there are no truths beyond that. I have to believe that somewhere outside of all of this, something greater exists, be it Christ or Buddha or the greater good of humanity. I'm willing to court death to find out what that is."

"So you're a young man who wants to cheat death," Shih

continued, hoping to move the story along and trip around the philosophical territory that always sent him lurking in dark corners of his soul.

"Yeah, yeah...young man...cheating death. Okay...so I invent the nanobots. I mean... people had already invented robots smaller than atoms, but I was the first to figure out how they could be used to repair cells."

"How did that all come about?"

"It's a long story and if I told you exactly, you wouldn't understand and you'd probably forget anyway."

The old young man heaved a deep breath, looking at a whirlwind of leaves as it swept along the bare pavement, the air crisp in his lungs.

"So there's a house on fire one day at the end of my block. I, of course, was the first one I tried the 'bots on. Well, my dog too, but I was the first human. Anyway, I run over to see what's wrong and this woman is shrieking, 'My baby! My baby!' I figured now was as good a time as any to test the 'bots."

He shuddered again and Shih stuck out a hand to steady him, but he quickly recovered and sat upright.

"I throw off my jacket and shove police officers, firemen out of the way and I stride into this fire. It's blindingly hot, but I'm not getting injured. My body is shooting out pain reactions all over, but I know the nanobots are working full-time to repair the cells just as quick as they're burning, so I kind of mentally block the pain and look for the baby.

"Outside, I can hear everyone screaming and shouting and thinking they have to recover two dead bodies now, but I hear a cry and I get an idea of where I'm going.

"I step in to the baby's room and I lift it up. It's badly hurt and I know it will die soon, but I take the cream with the 'bots in it and rub it all over the child and inject some into her bloodstream. The change spreads over her. Her black skin slowly ripens, becomes red again and pretty soon she's staring up at me clear-eyed and I knew there were at least two of us immortals in the world."

Shih had heard the story before, but this time, it contained the same elemental power it had had the first time he heard it so long ago. It felt like the lost chronicle of a dying race of men,

passed down from mouth to mouth through the ages. Shih shifted in his seat, uncomfortable with the notion that he was talking to Noah or Homer or Alexander.

"I carried the baby outside, see, and the whole way I feel like an angel. Like a new breed of man. The fire doesn't hurt the baby or me now, and we emerge from a huge wall of flame. I hand the baby to the mother and head back down the block."

"But, of course, they found you and made you give them the 'bots."

"Of course they did. Humanity has always wanted to bottle its miracles."

The darkness slowly wrapped itself around the two men, a billowing cape. They sat without talking, the wind humming to them and the sounds of the city at night growing towards ecstasy.

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In November, Moritz's wife Janice returned. Shih looked at her as though from behind a wall of gauzy wax. Some 600 years of celibacy had taken their hold on him. He no longer had to fight the stirrings in his loins, in his soul. He had come to terms with the lack of women, the lack of sex in his life, and found himself almost joyful to no longer have to worry about it. Every day, he grew slightly more dedicated to preserving a crumbling order.

Janice remained perfectly frozen at 25, the age all bodies stopped aging at. Her pert form seemed to shrink as she walked. She had the heavy walk of an ancient woman. We are all clowns, Shih thought, putting on our makeup and playing in this circus. The old had been playing at being young for untold ages now and they had become weeds, growing around the real young, choking them out. Shih seemed to recall a long-ago story about that, but he remained unable to shake it from his brain.

Janice and her husband danced uneasily around each other, their stares holding each other off and claiming separate corners of the dank little cesspool.

"I'm dying, Janice," Moritz said.

"I know, you ass," she said.

Shih stood off to the side, unsure of what to do. He longed to

ail their hearts, but he had forgotten that particular brand of magic long ago. It stayed buried in another cavern of his thoughts.

"Save him," she said, turning to Shih and for a moment he wavered on the edge of taking back 600 years of trying to brighten a Day-Glo world. He longed to make her happy.

"I can't. He's chosen to die. I am to be his counselor."

"Who's decreed this? The church's hierarchy collapsed 300 years ago. The branch in Burlington is only one of the few still clinging to life. You can stop this!"

She crossed to Alvin and took his head in her lap. She caressed his hair and held him, evoking the kind of love that only decades together could create. Shih watched them as though through a mist. Moritz lovingly caressed his wife's body, perhaps remembering picnics or outings or when the lottery picked them to have a child.

Shih cleared his throat and left the room, years of bitterness washing behind him.

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His mind made up, Shih plunged through the chilly December wind, braving the first snowstorm of the year, heading for the government building.

Government played virtually no role in Shih's world. For the most part, government died in the early 23rd century after man realized the full possibilities of the nanobots. In a world of immortals, where microscopic beings could construct anything out of atoms, the main functions of government became superfluous. Warfare no longer existed, as it proved futile to try to kill immortals or destroy property that built itself up exactly as it was before. Government's last tendrils crept through Shih's society in the form of the educational system and the system which handled the boeschkes, who had gradually slipped into dementia as they grew older and older.

Shih had long supposed that no one worked in the building he stood before now, its dark, expressionless windows hiding secrets. As he threw open the doors, however, he found himself in the world of his childhood.

The furniture and decorations inside the building that once

stood as the courthouse of Eklund County, South Dakota held the allure and feel of the 21st century. Tears welled in Shih's eyes, childhood flooding into him, the nanobots working hard to stop the electrical impulses that called memory to the front of the mind so readily. All around, workers stood motionless, as though the bombs of the last world war had frozen their existence.

The museum sprang to life. The nanobots cut off his long-term memory. Outside, the wind mourned the life of all things.

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Shih stood in the doorway, watching Janice hold Alvin's feeble head, feeding him small spoonfuls of butterscotch pudding. She leaned forward, kissing his lesioned forehead. Poor, sweet baby," she whispered as he hid in sleep.

Somewhere, a clock ticked. Shih had grown used to the smell of the cerebrecio in the past few months, but now—now it suffocated him again. He clawed at the edge of the tank, longing to climb out of the odor.

Janice coughed. "I don't remember the first time I saw him, you know. I understand I was the second. The second to receive the 'bots. Something about a fire."

Shih watched her, checking his watch.

"I always loved him. It was engrained in me. But he always grew more desperate. I wanted him to have the anti-boeschke surgery. I wanted him to get the new 'bots to make him forget things so his mind could go on processing new information. His own creation could save him now, but he clings to this notion that death holds mysteries. Death only holds pain."

She bitterly clicked her nails.

"I never understood Alvin. He felt responsible for the death of things like religion and philosophy and art. I tried to tell him it was natural progress, that some things must inevitably die, but he never listened to me."

Shih tried to remember the songs his mother had sung to him and found that they were gone. The 'bots occupied that portion of his brain apparently.

"Why aren't you stopping him?"

"I don't know. He's...I'm...the church isn't supposed to

condone suicide, but like you said, the church is gone now. I'm the church. He was in pain. He wanted to see what else there was. I wanted to help him. I think that's why I became a priest. I dimly remember..."

The lights flickered and hard sleet spattered the window. Alvin Moritz drew a tortured breath, his body slipping from him.

The door flew from its hinges. Shih and Janice watched as government men invaded Moritz's burrow, grabbing him from his bed, his eyes opening in paranoia and shock.

"It's going to be okay, baby!" Janice said. She trailed the men carrying her now nearly catatonic husband, her eyes finally raining.

Shih dispassionately rose, following the parade.

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Shih stood by the bedside of Dr. Alvin Moritz for what promised to be the last time.

"Why did you do it, Bobby?" Moritz said in a half-breath.

"I don't know. Janice asked me to," Shih said.

The suddenly old young man laughed. "Janice is crazy. You and I both know that. She's crazier than me or any of the boeschkes..."

That word seemed to open reverie.

"I had a friend once," Moritz continued. "His name was Jeff Boeschke. Most people forget that he's the reason the word *boeschke* exists."

"What happened to him?"

"He died. Well, he lived. But he died in his soul and left me alone. He was the only other one I could find who remembered adequately at all.

"We lost things, Bobby. We all lost things. I miss my dog. The 'bots ended up eating him alive."

He fell backwards onto the bed and coughed heavily.

Shih had to ask. "How did you stop the government men from operating?"

"Easy enough. I anticipated this would happen. The 'bots guarding the tumor have built a wall around it that no other 'bot can get through. It destroys them. I'd explain it to you, but you'd never understand and you wouldn't remember anyway."

Shih watched the first man to die in over 600 years slowly cross his way to a new land. All pioneers trailed in his footsteps.

Finally, the breathing grew tortured and Moritz slowly began to shut down. Janice held his hand as he cried. Shih found himself crying. He tried, but could not remember why.

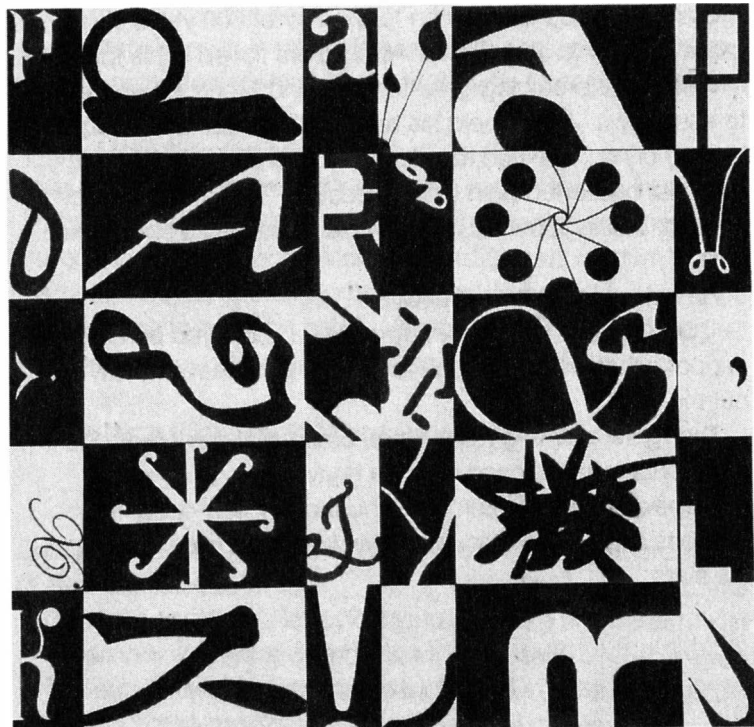
Moritz beckoned Shih to the bedside. "This is my Janice," he said, placing Janice's hand in his. "Make sure she's taken care of."

He turned to his beautiful wife.

"I don't blame you for betraying me. I loved you purely and I suppose that will be enough to get me into Heaven. Now shut out the light."

The lights, reacting to his voice command, turned off, the room once again closed under a heavy lid.

Somewhere in the eternal, a shout of joy flew out of the heavens like a great bird, and Alvin Moritz mingled with the stars.



Balance  
Adam Robinson

## One Thousand Years

Karen Boegler

The snow beneath our feet groaned a complaint as our heavy boots plodded the mile and a half distance from the van to the entrance of the cave. That November morning, the seven of us were uncommonly quiet, and the silence of the blanketed field pressed in on my ears. Squinting my eyes against the bright white, I let my lungs expand to take in the sharp morning air and expelled it in a quick puff of vapor. I watched as it whipped away from my face into nothingness. "Just a few more feet now," encouraged our guide, his eyes skirting the horizon for something known only to him. My heart gave a small leap of fear and expectation, and I too searched for the hidden mouth of the cave.

The interior of the cavern was damp, and as we began to make our way through the narrow clay passages, the moisture worked its way through the fabric of my gloves and the knees of my jeans. Many times the passages narrowed even further and the fronts of our sweatshirts became coated in the muddy earth as well. After what seemed like hours of serpentine crawling, the passage widened abruptly into a large room. Here, great clay columns hung from the ceiling, and eerie earthen towers grew upward from the floor, in a timeless stretch across the darkness.

"The columns forming from the ceiling are called stalactites, and their counterparts on the floor are stalagmites," our guide explained. "With every drip of water, a small bit of mineral is added to the tip of each. The process is very, very slow. In fact, every inch of that column took about a thousand years to form." After a short pause and a quick hand gesture, the guide finished, "Someday, those two columns will meet." As I looked upward, the light from my hat caught one of the stalactites, and the water droplet on its tip sparkled.

As the group continued its journey to the farther reaches of the caverns, I lingered behind, my light trained on the one miniscule bright point. My mind worked to wrap itself around the words of the guide. *One thousand years for every inch*. In that one drop, the cave held up its past, displaying it like a



jeweler, turning it around and around in the light. Reluctantly, I held up mine to compare.

A map without a scale is worth nothing at all, and that day in the belly of the cave, I was granted a scale to measure my life. Beside the cave's eons, I knew I had only years. Next to its centuries, I saw that days would have to suffice for me. The cave's age marked my seconds from that day on.

Several years later and many miles away, the memory of the cave still follows me. "I will outlive you," I sometimes hear it whisper with a cold, sour breath of air, and I buy a plane ticket to Europe. Its ageless depths enter my thoughts, and I begin to read a new novel, write a poem, sing aloud. Its cold damp touches my skin, and I dance to a song in the grocery store, laugh out loud at the punch line of a silly joke, watch a thunderstorm, compliment a stranger. Although the cave had existed for millenia, it has hibernated all the while, and I am determined not to.

Long after I am gone, the dark room of the cave will live in secret, breathing the black velvet air and punctuating its silence with the slow drip of water. Maybe with the passing of a decade or a century, the yawning mouth of the cave will close forever, and people will tread over its earthy shell remembering its cold, dark passages—or maybe they will remember nothing at all. Still others, however, will pass the cool stone above my resting head and will remember how I laughed, how I smiled, how I danced along through my short stay. Maybe I will outlive that cave after all.

## War and the Art of Turf Maintenance

Patrick Grode

The living room had looked normal enough the night before. However, when Harold came down the stairs that morning, the room was changed. The carpet appeared to have been touched up with colors from nature's spring palette, a mild mottling of green. Harold descended the last few steps and lay down, pressing his face close to the floor. The green was not paint. It was young shoots of grass.

Unable to decide what to do with the grass growing on his living room carpet, Harold shrugged, tried not to think too much about it, and went to the office as usual. After all, he reasoned, these things have a way of resolving themselves. Of course, they don't always—for example, the grass in the living room was taller the next morning. It was also, Harold noted with dismay, considerably thicker.

By the fifth day, Harold could scarcely see the carpet. He resolved to seek an expert opinion and called a lawn service. Actually, he called several, for the first three in the phone book hung up on him after calmly explaining that grass does not grow on living room carpets. Harold did not explain the problem to the fourth firm, but simply asked for an estimate on his property. He was told that it would be difficult to add a client in the middle of the summer, but they would be happy to send someone by.

A worker in greasy overalls and a sweat-stained T-shirt knocked on the door the next evening. Harold ushered him into the hallway, then into the living room. The man's eyes squinted.

"That carpet?"

"No, it's grass," Harold replied. "That's actually the reason I called."

"Well I'll be," muttered the man in overalls. "How'd you do that? I don't think you can just plant grass seed on the floor. Wouldn't have no soil to take root in."

He bent down to pull some of the grass out and examine its roots.

"I just walked downstairs one morning and there it was," offered Harold, as if to explain the phenomenon rationally.

"It's a hybrid Kentucky bluegrass. That's a pretty tough breed, but it generally likes more sunlight than it's getting in here."

"I just want to know what you can do about it, Harold told him. "I don't want grass in my living room. I want you to kill it."

"Well...I can't spray this, 'cause it's indoors and you'd get chemicals all over. Can't really burn it either, 'cause your house might go with it. It'd take too long to pull it all...I guess I'd say get a small push mower."

"But can't you help me somehow? Can't you do anything?" asked Harold.

"Sorry," the man in overalls replied. "I don't do living rooms." And with that he left, shaking his head slightly. Harold valiantly decided to ignore the grass some more, a strategy he preferred to think of as "passive resistance."

By the tenth day, the grass was seven inches high and the room was unpresentable. Harold's brother was supposed to visit for supper that night, and Harold resolved to take action. He pulled his lawnmower out of the shed and wheeled it through the back door and into the living room. The mower was powered by a 3.5 horsepower gasoline engine, so Harold opened every window for ventilation before firing it up. He mowed the entire living room, including underneath the furniture, then put the mower away.

The living room looked fairly attractive now, aside from the orange upholstery clashing with the green of the grass. Harold decided that he probably preferred mowing the floor to vacuuming it, except that the exhaust lingered a bit in the room afterwards.

When Harold's brother arrived, he was a little surprised by the changed appearance of the living room.

"What happened?" he asked, pointing to the floor.

"Grass grew over my carpet," answered Harold, matter-of-factly.

"Bummer, dude," replied his brother with a shrug.

Harold's brother made no further mention of the grass as

they grilled steaks and drank beer. When they sat in the living room and watched baseball on TV, his brother didn't even lean down for an inspection of the floor. Harold resolved to adopt his brother's passive acceptance of the situation.

Over the next two weeks, mowing the living room became a regular part of Harold's housekeeping routine, just another task like washing dishes or cleaning the bathroom. Things went along pretty smoothly and Harold began, even, to become fond of his unique living room. It was nice to walk around barefoot on soft grass, so Harold didn't think much of it when the grass began to spread into the hallway and up the stairs. He simply expanded his mowing and accepted the altered condition of his house the way one accepts a slight increase in the phone bill.

Admittedly, the appearance of dandelions disturbed him a little, and the toadstools even more so. But when an anthill appeared in one corner of the living room, just to the left of the recliner, Harold decided to fight back. Ant poison apparently wasn't the solution, because another anthill soon jumped up on the other side of the room, and then grasshoppers began leaping about on the sofa. Meanwhile, grass began to sprout in Harold's bedroom.

Bottle of Round-Up in hand, Harold formally declared war on the grass. He sprayed the whole of the living room and most of the hallway before he ran out. The next day, the grass seemed a bit wilted and the furniture smelled funny. Two days later, the grass was nearly recovered and the furniture still smelled funny. So he tried to pull the grass up by the roots, starting at one corner of the living room and tearing everything out, down to the bare carpet. He worked for an hour and completed a four by six foot square of floor, but found out the next day that the grass could sprout just as fast as he could pull it.

One morning, as he was making coffee and looking at the grass like a general surveying enemy placements, Harold realized something. The encroachment of the grass onto the kitchen linoleum gave it away, really—thin brave blades like the first Spaniards venturing into the New World. Perhaps Harold's growing frustration caused him to project militaristic intentions onto a simple plant, but at that moment he perceived that

the grass wasn't simply growing in his home, it was *invading* his territory.

Therefore, Harold resolved to play Scipio Africanus to the grass's Hannibal. When he returned from the office later that day, he pulled three area rugs off the concrete floor of the basement and dragged them outside. After unrolling the rugs on the lawn, Harold carried a recliner and footstool out, then the television.

Settling into the chair in his improvised den and opening a beer, Harold grinned at the lawn and announced, "All right, grass, I'm in your world now. *I'm* taking over your home, and you can't stop me. How do you like that, huh?" Then he watched the evening news.

The grass grew twice as fast that night, so that the next morning it was halfway across the kitchen floor.

"So I got you scared, huh?" Harold sneered as he cooked breakfast. That evening, he spread a tarp and sleeping bag next to the area rugs and spent the night on the lawn. The grass within the house grew furiously, but Harold just laughed at it.

The night after he carried the refrigerator and stove out onto the lawn, the grass in the house retreated a little. A few more nights of Harold sleeping out on the lawn and rearranging his outdoor dwelling, and the grass was out of the kitchen and his bedroom. Harold marked its gradual disappearance with glee. Eventually, there was only a tiny patch of green left in one corner of the living room.

"Things got different when you found out we could both play at the same little game, didn't they? Well, now you've learned to stay where you belong," Harold gloated as he pulled the last bit of grass. Afterwards, he moved the rugs and furniture back inside.

That evening before bed, Harold began to read a book on Japanese rock gardens. Rocks seemed a unique and attractively static landscaping alternative.

Witherington

## **Will the Man Live**

**Kiel Mutschelknaus**

**Brandon Valley High School**

**First Place Poetry**

Among the carnage of Lego blocks,  
The figure stood.  
A permanent black line smile, two dots of irises,  
Decorate the yellow flesh head.  
Stuck in stiff motions of plastic arms and legs,  
The man stands still.  
Only til the grubby hands of the gods fiddle with him,  
Will the toy play and dance.  
Only through the mind of the child,  
Will the man live.

## Shiver

Margaret Siorek

O'Gorman High School

Second Place Poetry

I lay my head  
Upon a friend's book  
And I put a blanket on my back  
Trying to get warm  
I drum my fingers  
On a borrowed desk  
As I try to invent reasons  
And ways to be warm again  
I sit in the cold house  
That I'm living in for a while  
And pause to look outside  
To see the warm sun  
Knowing it is so close  
But I am too afraid to go upstairs  
Too scared of seeing you  
I am tired of the abuse  
But I don't know how to stop it  
So I just cry a few silent tears  
And shiver

## Poem in Lakota

Alana Black Bird

Tiospaye Topa High School

Third Place Poetry

Igmu kin,  
Pazi'ca na iyo'waya  
Igmu kin,  
Yuta na waskata,  
Witko'tkoke iye'cel inyanka  
Igmu kin,  
Mistinma ninte' inapa

### *Translation*

The cat,  
Stretches and yawns  
The cat,  
Eats and plays,  
Runs like crazy  
The cat,  
Went back to sleep



## Golden Giggles

Andrea Buchanan

Brandon Valley High School

First Place Prose

We had saved up wood planks for weeks. Anything that was not nailed down my sister and I took. We ran down our beaten path and were grinning like fools by the time we got to our charming tree. It towered above us like a playful giant, welcoming us to build a playhouse in his hair. We took the invitation gladly and scurried up into the high top. Air twenty feet above the ground always did smell better. It was crisp and clean and the sweetness of it filled our little lungs with renewed childhood happiness. The creek trickled below us, and it looked like a grand river from so high up. In our minds there were rapids and sharp rocks, but because the river was in our kingdom, we would never be harmed. We were princesses destined to rule over the forest from our castle tree top.

The best princess was my sister. The sun would bounce off her lemon blond hair, and the rose colored glasses she was wearing showed off her stark blue eyes that were cast with shadows of love and intelligent schemes. In our childhood haste, we had forgotten hammers. We were content to lean back and lounge at the sprawling canopy top. We stretched our arms behind our heads as we had seen our father do many times.

All around us birds of every shade flew. There were tangerine birds that chirped merrily, and little chickadees with their little red caps splayed over their heads. The blond queen began to climb higher to the birds. She stretched her small limbs, reaching for the next branch that would bring her closer to her colorful chirping subjects. Turquoise leaves were becoming stuck in her golden hair, and her chubby giggles could be heard echoing through the forest.

Soon she was so high up all I saw when I looked for her was radiating light. She was surrounded with it, and I had to squint my eyes and listen to the giggles to place her. Calling for me, she stepped out of the sun and waved vigorously. I could see sticks sticking out of her socks and clothing. Her eyes were

sparkling with the vitality of the forest and her life. The heavens around us sizzled and snapped with the excitement flowing out of us. She tossed her head back, jutting her chin in the air, showing the forest her superiority.

She began a hasty decent to my level. Over twigs and branches the size of tree trunks she climbed. I saw it before she did, and I couldn't yell a warning fast enough as she grabbed a broken branch. My breathing stopped and my eyes became glazed. Time froze to slow motion as she slipped and started to fall. She didn't even scream. All I remember is her giggles, just her giggles and her rose colored glasses smashed on the rocks.

## On the Threshold of Forever

Joseph Green

Sioux Valley High School

Second Place Prose

There are events and places in every person's life that will remain within his or her mind forever. Even the smallest details linger, making events that happened twenty-five years prior seem as though you could have lived them yesterday. What a room smelled like, the way a glass of water neglected on a dresser refracted sunlight in a display of the rainbow on your wall—it's what makes a memory real in your mind. It's what causes the etching of a certain experience on your memory. Etching—indeed, forever etched.

I had been avoiding the house for months. Well, the house was not what drove me away. It was friendly enough. It was small with white, chipped paint—a monument to the lifestyles of the elderly. It could have used some repairs, but the house itself was not the source of the darkness that kept me from crossing its threshold. It was what abided inside that terrified me. Not the people inside, but the sinister concept that inevitably strikes every person at one time or another: death. Death seeped from the cracks in the walls. It made the little white house on Third Street foul to my nose. And it angered me. Something so ugly, so cheap, stealing a loved one from me when I could do nothing more than cry and beg for the demon to cease. And still the little house on Third Street cared nothing for my troubles or the passing of time and its owners.

I cut through its shaggy green lawn with the protection only of my mother. The steps towered that day, an Everest that threatened to claim me if I dared to scale its peak. But while I was making my ascent up those concrete cliffs, I realized that my Everest was only a distraction, and the steps were more than on a lonely mountain. They were the path to the gateway of eternity. And with my realization, the small, friendly house swallowed me whole.

I felt betrayed, standing in that entryway. Blue-painted floors lay under my feet, unfeeling in their neutrality. Windows surrounded the room, but there was no sunlight anymore. It

# The Game

Melissa Fleming

Oelrichs High School

Third Place Prose

The score was 50–49 Colts' favor, four seconds left in the game. Mike was concentrating at the free throw line. If he could make both shots, not only would the Bulldogs win the game but he would be the hero for scoring the winning points. He visualized the ball going through the hoop. Slowly, he raised the ball. The pressure was overwhelming. If he only could make the two points that it would take to send the Bulldogs to the championship. He could probably be the first senior to get a date with Deshona, the new hottie that had shown up a few days earlier. He had never seen a girl like her in his whole life. She almost seemed to glow whenever he saw her. He had only been brave enough to ask her name. Even then, he could feel himself blushing. His friends had never even noticed her, but Mike figured that he might have a better shot hooking up with her if they didn't know about her. Oh what was he thinking! Come on, concentrate, visualize, ready and shoot... The ball flew through the air, circled the rim and slid through the net with a gentle swoosh.

The crowd went wild as they started chanting Mike's name. One more! That's all he had to do. Just make one last shot. He tried desperately to empty his head, clear his mind of all thoughts. Slowly, he raised his arms as he aligned his body with the hoop. Effortlessly, he let the ball fly. Swoosh...nothing but net. He had done it. He had won the game. He could barely control himself as his teammates rushed to him, congratulating him on the shot. Yet, at the same time, the Colts checked the ball in and rushed by the excited and distracted Bulldog team. The shot went up, the buzzer sounded, the ball bounced up and hit the rim and then sunk through the net. The Bulldogs had lost 52–51.

The long ride home on the old bus was devastating. Why had they celebrated so soon? They should have set up the defense right away, but they had to gloat; and in doing so, they had lost the game. Who knew that four seconds of glory would

end in such tragedy for the Bulldogs? Mike brooded over the game for the entire three-hour drive back to the school. As the bus pulled into the school parking lot, Mike watched as his disappointed teammates slowly exited the bus. They were disappointed in the night's events. Never had they been so foolish as to assume a victory so soon.

Mike stood up from his seat, grabbing his duffel bag, which was filled with the uniform, socks and shoes that he had worn as he and the rest of the team had worked and sweated, trying to earn the victory that had slipped right through their fingertips. He knew that not only would he never have a chance to get to play in the championship game, but he also pictured Deshona laughing at him as he walked through the halls Monday morning. As he entered the gym, he looked at the walls. They were covered in banners and signs made to show Bulldog team spirit. But that spirit was gone now. They had blown the opportunity. His friends walked by him in silence as he stared in a daze. Never had they seen him in such a bad state of mind. He hadn't spoken a word since the game had ended.

He finally snapped out of it as he heard a locker slam. He turned to look at the clock. Straight up midnight. He had been zoning for a full two hours since the bus arrived. He couldn't even remember what he was thinking about. Mike began to realize that his legs were numb from standing in the same position for so long. He knew he had to get home. His parents were either worried sick or preparing for the bloodshed they would bestow upon him when he entered the house. Either way, he was in trouble.

Slowly, Mike made his way to the locker room. As he entered the dark room, he felt a shiver go up his back. Mike felt his way along the wall, moving his hands across the bricks feeling for the light switch. He felt his hand graze the light switch as light began to fill the room. The locker room was filled with the scent of body odor mixed in with old gym socks and cheap cologne. Clothes littered the floor in front of the lockers where his teammates had practiced their jump shot with warm-up shirts and hadn't quite hit the hook in the back of the lockers.

Mike made his way through the maze of lockers and clothes until he reached good ol' lucky number seven. He tossed his

bag on the ground and grabbed his practice trunks, shirts, and gym socks and stuffed them in with the mess of his game clothes already wadded in a giant matted ball at the bottom of the bag. He unzipped the compartment and released the keys from the forturous grasp of his sweat covered clothes.

With a light swipe of his hand, Mike closed his locker and headed back towards the door. As he exited the locker room, he again felt a cold shiver, which only reminded him to turn off the lights. He made his way through the hall back to the gym door. As he pushed the door, he could hear the chain rattle. He had been locked in. How could this have happened? Didn't they know he was inside? They had to. It was probably just a joke some of his teammates were pulling on him, trying to brighten him up a little. Oh well, guys will be guys. He made his way to the other side of the gym to exit there. It, too, was chained shut. Mike made his way down the hall. He could always go out the door at the end of the hall. No problem. Actually, big problem. He was completely locked in. All the doors were chained shut. Mike began to think that his friends' little prank was getting out of hand. I mean, who would want to be trapped inside the school? Enough was enough. He could just use the phone to call his parents. They could call the principal. The principal could call the janitor. The janitor would let him out. Too bad the only phone that was accessible to students was in the office, which is always locked directly after school.

Mike sat down on the bleachers and thought about how he could get himself out of his situation. Wait! Someone else had to be in the gym. How else could he have heard the locker shut? It was just a prank! His teammates were probably all hiding out, watching him worry. Trying not to laugh at him. He called out, "OK guys. Joke's over. How about we all go home and have a good night's rest?" Nothing. Not a giggle. Not a laugh. Not a sound.

He could feel himself getting angrier as he imagined his friends, hidden behind a locker or table, pointing and laughing. He had had enough. Why were they doing this to him after such a terrible loss? Why were they torturing him so? He screamed out, "OK you guys. That's it. I'm tired, hungry, and I

want to go home now!" Still nothing, not a sound. Mike began to pace the gym. He knew someone was in there with him; the locker had slammed shut.

Then he heard it. It was an echoing sound of footsteps walking down the stairs. At long last they had finally given up! He slowly made his way to the base of the stairs. The footsteps were getting closer. He crouched down hiding in the shadows, ready to jump up and scare the living bajeezers out of whoever was walking down the steps. The footsteps were getting closer as the thudding of shoe soles connected with the wooden stairs. The hair on the back of his neck was beginning to stand on end. It was as if someone had taken and run their fingernails across a chalkboard. He would finally be able to get his revenge on whomever it was that locked him in the school. Buzzzzzz. The school bell rang. Mike jumped as the sound echoed throughout the halls. He had forgotten that the school buzzer rang every hour or so. He crouched down again but the footsteps had stopped.

Mike looked up the staircase but saw nothing. He began to ponder. Where had they gone? They had been right there walking down the steps. He heard them, or at least he thought he had heard them. Maybe he just needed a nap. Sleep would definitely do him some good. Mike started to walk back towards the gym when he heard the familiar sounds of lockers opening and people talking. Yet something wasn't right. There weren't any lights on. Not only that, there was nobody in the halls. He watched in fear as he saw lockers doors opening and slamming shut in front of him. Over and over and over they opened and slammed shut. This prank, or whatever it was, was being taken way too far.

He turned and ran, trying to get away from the sounds behind him, surrounding him, chasing him. He kept running until he heard the booming voice, "No running in the halls!" Mike stopped as though someone had built a brick wall in front of him. Slowly, he turned around. He saw a man at the far end of the hall. The pale deathly white man made his way towards Mike. "Don't you know there's no running in the halls?" the man asked in a demanding tone. "I do not tolerate running in my halls. Do you understand me?" he bellowed. Mike couldn't

move. As the man got closer, Mike noticed the reddish marks that circled the man's neck. The red was throbbing as if there was something inside trying to escape. Mike began to run. He could hear the footsteps of the man deep in chase. The phrase "Stop running in my halls!" echoed through the building. Mike turned his head only to see the man's face full of anger and pain. His eyes seemed to bulge out of his head as his teeth were grinding, showing his intense rage.

Mike couldn't stand to see him anymore. The figure was too hideous. He ran, checking all the doors, trying to find some way to escape, some way to get away. Finally, one door gave way. Mike dodged inside the classroom. As he held the doorknob, he tried desperately to catch his breath. His panting became deeper and deeper as he found it harder to breathe. Slowly, he turned around. As he did, he noticed that he wasn't alone. Sitting in the seats were the ghostly images of students, angry students. Their eyes stared at him in an evil rage. The teacher stared at him with a glare of uncontrollable hatred. Her eyes were fixed on his. Mike felt as if his lungs were collapsing, closing in on his heavy, pulsing heart. It seemed as if all the blood was draining from his body.

He could barely swallow the saliva that was gathering in his mouth. It slowly went down his throat like giant clots of blood, oozing its way to its desolate location. As he looked around, he could see the stab wounds that appeared in multiple locations on not only the teacher but the students as well. Some showed where a knife had pierced the heart. Others had a smile cut from ear to ear. One boy had pieces of his windpipe and muscle tissue falling out of what was once a throat. Mike could feel his stomach start to churn. The sight of internal organs trying to escape from crevasses made by a knife was unbearable. The students turned back to look at their teacher as she stood up. She kept her eyes locked with Mike's as she moved closer to him.

Mike's legs began to tremble as he felt her cold breath on his skin. The hair on his neck and arms stood on end. Never had he seen anything like this in his entire life. It was all a dream, he told himself. He would soon be waking up to the sweet smell of cinnamon rolls in the oven. But no, all he could smell was the

horrid reeking of decomposition growing thicker and thicker in his nostrils.

As the woman put her cold, clammy hand on his neck, Mike grew faint. He had to escape. Somehow. Some way. She began to put her face closer to his. Closer...closer...closer... She began to breathe in heavily as if trying to suck the air out of his lungs. Mike screamed in agony. He threw open the door and ran down the hall. He didn't stop until he reached the library.

Mike made his way through the aisles of books filled with stories of fantasy, reality, mystery, magic, and murder. Slowly he began to notice the faint clicking sound that was creeping up on him. It was as if someone was tapping a finger on a desk. The sound was getting closer. Mike crouched down against a shelf. He let out a deathly cry as he saw the rotting remains of what may have been a librarian. Chunks of flesh were being held in place only by the old flowered dress the woman was wearing. She appeared as though she had been caught in a paper shredder. Clumps of skin and muscle swayed on her bones as she walked. Rage was building in her eyes. She turned her head from side to side, her bones grinding together.

He slid closer to the ground, hoping that she wouldn't see him, that she would pass by without even a glance. As he slid down, a book caught the tail of his shirt and hit the floor with a thud. The old librarian screamed out in rage, "How could you treat a book like that? Get out of my library. Get out!!!!" Books began to fly off the shelves, hurtling towards Mike. They began to hit him. It felt as if bricks were being dropped on him. He couldn't take punishment like that. He fled through the door and slammed it shut behind him. The books pounded against the door.

Mike began to walk down the hall. It had to be almost morning. People would have to start showing up for school. At that thought, he began to get excited. Mike started to jog. The job sped into a run. Soon Mike was moving faster than he had ever thought possible. Then it happened. Mike began to fall, plummeting to the bottom of the staircase. He hit with a hard thud. He heard a loud crack as a shot of pain streamed through his body. Then everything went black.

"Mike, Mike, open your eyes," the soft voice of Deshona



echoed through his head. "Please, Mike, open your eyes." Slowly, Mike began to awake from his slumber. He realized that his head was resting on Deshona's lap. He began to sit up. As he did, he realized that he felt no pain. Mike looked around. Everything seemed normal. Maybe it *had* all been just a dream. Then he saw it. He noticed the deep slits on her wrists. Her veins had been sliced, and in some places, were dangling out like loose strings on a shirt. How could this be? No one could survive something like that, he told himself.

"It's ok, Mike. You're one of us now," Deshona said with a crooked smile. "You will never feel pain again. You will never worry about grades, never worry about anything." But what about his life? He couldn't be...dead. "No," Mike said. "It's not true." Deshona snickered, "It's true. You're dead. You wanted me and now you got me. We can spend eternity together. Just you and me."

But how did it happen? Then, Mike remembered the fall. He must have done more than break a few bones. He must have killed himself. How stupid he was. He took his own life and didn't even know it. Thoughts of his parents and friends standing over his coffin, shedding millions of tears, ran through his head. Deshona started to laugh an evil cackle. "You're crazy if you think that they would miss you. Why, it's *your* fault that your team lost the game. It's *your* fault that they won't be going to the championship. What kind of son are you anyway? I bet you just thought you were hot stuff, didn't you? Prancing through life as if there wasn't a care in the world. If you only had a life like mine, you would understand how good you've got it now." Mike looked at her. Pain filled her eyes. He didn't know what had happened to her, but he knew she was wrong. He loved his family. He loved his life. He didn't want to be dead. No, it couldn't be true. It couldn't.

"Young man, get your rear end out of bed. Do you have any idea what time it is? You have less than an hour to get to school." Mom? It was! Mike opened his eyes, seeing his familiar walls. His pillow lay gently under his head. His blanket wrapped snugly around him. The sweet smell of cinnamon rolls baking in the oven filled his nostrils. "Mike, hustle up! You have a big game tonight. You don't want to be late for school."

Big game? It was all a dream! Mike had dreamed the whole thing. He was alive. He was alive.

Or was he? What if this was just an illusion? What if he was dead, and he was just fantasizing that he was alive? What if? What if the world was just a giant conspiracy? What if what you thought to be reality was just a figment of your imagination?

What if?

The End

Or is it?